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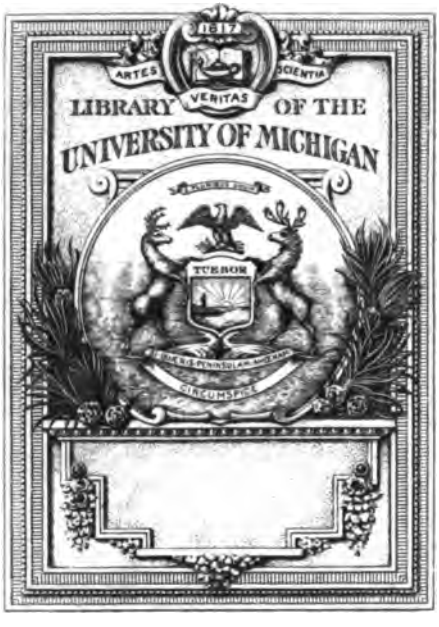

THE GIFT OF
Dean Joseph A. Bursley

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Friquette . . . took her master by the waist and began to polka with him.

PHOTOGRAVURE FROM ORIGINAL DRAWING BY LOUIS MEYNELL.

The Works of

CHARLES PAUL DE KOCK

With a General Introduction by

JULES CLARETIE

FRIQUETTE

Translated into English by

EDITH MARY NORRIS

THE FREDERICK J. QUINBY COMPANY

BOSTON LONDON PARIS

Edition

Limited to One Thousand Copies

Number.....

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PRINTED ON OLD STRATFORD PAPER MADE BY
MITTINEAGUE PAPER COMPANY

Plimpton Press
Printers and Binders, Norwood, Mass.
U.S.A.

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CHAPTER I

A Game of Bezique. Friquette

"Look you, Plantureau, I have a settled conviction on that subject and I shall not change it; because one must show determination in all things, and I flatter myself that I possess that quality. When I say, 'It is so,' well, it is so."

The speaker, who was engaged in playing a game of cards with his friend spoke in a most emphatic tone.

"It occurs to me that during your wife's life she always replied to such an assertion on your part, 'It is not so,'" answered the person addressed, dryly.

"You are most completely mistaken; during my wife's life as now, I did exactly as I had made up my mind to do; but by some strange coincidence it invariably happened that my ideas and desires and plans accorded with Ursule's, so that made everything go along smoothly enough, and we never had the slightest discussion," answered his friend.

"You were extremely fortunate. A wife who is always of the same opinion as her husband is rare. I'm sorry to say I'm not so lucky as you

in that respect; mine is almost inevitably of a contrary opinion. Of course, I don't pay any attention to that, because the man should be the master; but we necessarily dispute about fifteen times a week. How do we play it?"

"We'll make it two thousand as usual, we have four packs. One may make five hundred, and then when one has a treble bezique he makes the fifteen hundred and wins the game immediately."

"Yes, yes! But you've only dealt me eight cards; at my mother-in-law's they always deal nine."[1]

"Oh, that makes it altogether too easy, the nine is a gross mistake. When eight only are dealt, the game presents many more difficulties and greatly enhances the pleasure of the players."

"I am by way of inventing a game with which everyone will be delighted; I think it will prove a great success."

"Really? But come, take up your card in the mean time."

"Imagine, Belatout, a pack which contains a hundred and four cards."

"Two whole packs, then."

"No, it will be a single pack of one hundred and four cards."

"You've invented something new, then?"

"No, it will merely have the single and the

[1] Nine cards should properly be dealt in Rubicon bezique, which is played with four packs.

double cards; for instance, the ace and the double ace; the knave of clubs and the double knave of of clubs, and so forth; do you catch the idea?"

"Not quite; why, what will be the use of having double cards?"

"Oh, my dear fellow, they'll often be of great service; the double will take the single cards, and three single ones will take a double; it will afford endless complications."

"I'm afraid it will be too complicated. I score a hundred with the ace — and what are you going to call your new game?"

"I haven't decided on a name yet; I had thought of calling it the game of Œdipus."

"By Jove, there are enigmas to be solved in this game, then?"

"Yes, it'll be necessary to find the method of winning. Each of my kings is an Œdipus. I shall have new faces made for them."

"I score sixty with the four queens."

"You seem to score very frequently."

"Yes, because I'm attending to my play and not to your Œdipus. Take your card."

"I'm looking for a designer to make new faces for my pack. The queens shall be Jocastas."

"What does your wife think of this invention?"

"By Jove! as usual she cries and she storms, and asserts that I'm going to make a failure of it and lose money. Happily that doesn't prevent my calmly taking my own way."

"I score two hundred and fifty. Take your card."

"But if a man were to listen to the women he would never do anything, he would never be out of leading strings. I must go my own gait; I've a genius for invention. I want to discover something that will make me a millionnaire twice over."

"Twice over? a double millionnaire, eh? A single million will not suffice you, then?"

"When one is on the road to fortune why should he stop at anything?"

"Listen to me, my dear Plantureau; as you are aware, I am your friend. Besides, I am, I believe eight or ten years older than you; for I am just entering my fifty-third year — and you?"

"My wife has forbidden me to tell my age."

"As you please, I don't make a point of it. Well, for all that, I am your friend and I am interested in all that concerns you, and so I take leave to say that up to the present your wife has been right in opposing your inventions; for if you are on the way to fortune it occurs to me that you're walking in it crab-fashion. Take your card. You had a good business in horned cattle, and horned cattle are always profitable, but since your father died you've given it up."

"My father left me money enough to retire; I have no further need of doing business."

"That's all well enough, I've nothing to say against that. Enjoy your fortune, take your

pleasure; this is your card. To lead a life of leisure in your home is all very well, but since you retired from the cattle business, which enriched you, you've given yourself up to this rage for inventions, which costs money and brings none in."

"Ah, you're just like everybody else, you see no merit except in success. Because a man is not immediately successful, he's an idiot, a fool. The Fultons, Colombs, Gutenbergs, were they successful at the outset? That's the misfortune of living in a little town where a man can't give scope to his ideas; for the people are not broad enough to comprehend them and put them in operation."

"My dear fellow, don't speak ill of our good town of Bar-le-Duc. In the first place, it's a mighty pleasant little place. It is watered by the small river Orney, in which are caught very fine trout; and, besides, excellent jams and preserves are made here, which have become celebrated and are sought after by all gourmands. I score the five hundred. The wines of Bar are very good, nearly as delicate as those of Champagne. We are fifty-four leagues from Paris, it is true; but what does that matter? When one is well enough off at home it isn't necessary for him to go forth in quest of happiness elsewhere. As the proverb has it, 'A rolling stone gathers no moss.'"

"That proverb isn't common sense; I maintain, on the contrary, that one must keep actively moving to make his pickings."

"But when one already has a nice little hoard to his hand, of what use is it to expose it to the accidents of fate? Say, Plantureau, it seems to me you're playing with nine cards!"

"Why, yes, so I am."

"If that's one of your new inventions it won't make your fortune."

"You keep saying to me, 'take a card,' and I must have taken one too many."

"By and by, if you expect to play with a pack of a hundred and four cards, you'll have to get used to holding a good many in your hand."

"You're poking fun at me, Belatout; but you shall see! my new game will be very successful."

"I hope so with all my heart, my dear fellow, for ever since you've been inventing you've expected success in vain. You've made lamps that were to burn without oil, you've had them manufactured by the hundreds, and you have not sold two of them. Some people assert that they won't burn at all."

"Yes, with gas they will, but they don't know how to use them."

"You've made ovens too, which were to cook without fire."

"Yes, you must have steam; you won't deny the steam, I hope?"

"I deny nothing, only I know what unfortunate events resulted from the use of your ovens. You sold two of them, one to a wholesale grocer,

the other to a die-stamper. In using it to cook his dinner the grocer, who wanted to see if his sauerkraut was cooking, had his eye put out by a puff of steam which went off like a gun; with the die-stamper it was different, his oven exploded and one of the pieces struck him in the face and carried away all one side of his nose."

"I can't be blamed for that; they neither of them followed my directions."

"That didn't prevent you from having to pay for the grocer's eye and the lost half of the die-stamper's nose; the latter was very reluctant to settle, he wanted a large sum on the ground that before the accident he had been a good-looking fellow, and he asserted that with only one nostril he couldn't find a woman who would have him."

"He was lying, for he has found one since that; but he has said that since then he cannot smell anything."

"In fact, your ovens are stored with your lamps; your wife says she has two rooms which are full of them, and that's what makes her so angry. Fortunately your game of Œdipus will not take up so much space, we must hope it won't require any. Count our beziques; it seems to me you haven't scored many."

"This game is too simple, too easy for me. Give me backgammon or chess; those are games, if you like. But I have something in my head vastly more interesting than all that."

"Another invention?"

"Exactly so. I tell you, I want to succeed and I shall succeed; but for that I must go to Paris, it is only there that a man can make his way."

"People also get out at elbows there when they are not successful."

"Pshaw! you talk like my wife, and it's not the way to make me listen to you. You don't like Paris because you don't know it, for you've never been there."

"I beg your pardon, I do know Paris; not very well, in truth, for I only stayed there three days at the time of my marriage. I had to buy my gifts for the bride, and my father said, 'Go to Paris, you'll find everything of the best there.' So I went, but on the third day I came away promptly enough, being in a great hurry to get back to my intended."

"But in three days, you must allow, you did not have time to get acquainted with Paris. You could have seen nothing of it."

"Oh, yes, I saw not a few things; for instance, the river that cuts Paris in two, and then the Jardin des Plantes, where they have some animals. I even gave the bear a penny roll to eat."

"To think that you were provincial enough to go to Paris to feed the bears! What a pretty recreation!"

"And why not, if it amused me?"

"I'll wager that you didn't go into a theatre!"

"You're mistaken, I did go there."

"To the Opera?"

"Not exactly, but it was a very fine theatre; it was the Théâtre de la Gaîté on a boulevard, where there were five or six theatres quite near together."

"Oh, that was the Boulevard du Temple, it is demolished now."

"I wanted to amuse myself, to have a laugh; so I said to myself, 'I'll go to the Théâtre de la Gaîté, the entertainment there will naturally be of a cheerful character.' But no, just the reverse. Just imagine, they played a piece in which everybody was sad. The princess wept, the prince howled and the children cried. In the last act everybody died, either by the knife or poison. I said to myself then, 'If this is what they call the Gaîté I've had enough of it, and I shan't go there again.'"

"You happened on a tearful drama."

"Then they should not put on its façade Théâtre de la Gaîté. Faith, I did not see much of that article in Paris, which seemed to me a very dangerous city."

"Yet you let your son go there to study law; you see, you aren't consistent yourself."

"In the first place, it was not I, it was my wife; no, to tell the truth, we both of us wanted to make a celebrated advocate of Eugène. Every one said to me, 'Your son will get on much quicker in the great city.' For his part, Eugène ardently desired

to be there. I let him go, and I can't congratulate myself on the fact that I did so. What has my son learned in Paris? To spend money, to smoke like a draughty stove, to speak a language which is neither French nor Gallic — slang, in fact. Pretty language that! They call it slang; I say, thieves' Latin, for it's the language used by those people. Do you think that it is very nice to hear a young man who's received in good society speak the language of the wretches who are destined to the hulks? To me it is pitiable. In fact, the young men of today think fit to refuse the respect they owe to their parents; they call them old fogies, and think it very uncalled for when those who have had experience presume to give them advice. I should not be greatly astonished if one of these days they demand that the government should pass an act by which people will not be permitted to live after they have attained the age of sixty."

"Well, that is an idea, surely."

"My poor wife is dead, and well for her that it is so; I mean by that that at least she is spared the pain of hearing our son make game of us and say to us, 'You are not stylish!' 'What a queer-looking phiz you've got!' or, 'What do you take me for?' and other pretty phrases of a like nature."

"My dear Belatout, all young people allow themselves to be carried away with what is new,

everything that is in vogue seems fine to them; we must forgive a good many things to youth. Take your card, it is you who forget now."

"My dear Plantureau, I have been young myself, and when my father said to me, 'You must go to see your aunt,' I did not say to him in response, 'What do you take me for?'"

"Is your son still in Paris?"

"Yes, but I have written to him to come back, to leave that modern Babylon and return to the paternal roof, and I am expecting him. I am shaping circumstances towards his marriage with the notary's niece here, Mademoiselle Boissalé; you know it will be a very good match for him."

"Mademoiselle de Boissalé? Why, she's very plain."

"What does that matter to me?"

"Nothing, I can imagine; but it will matter much to your son. Take your card."

"Mademoiselle Boissalé, apart from her financial advantages, has one great merit in my eyes."

"What is that?"

"She doesn't play the piano. Oh, my dear fellow, defend me from those young ladies who play the piano! Why, the piano has become the pest of society; that is rather a strong expression, I own, but really the piano has become so common that one can't escape from it anywhere."

"When it is well played it's not disagreeable to listen to."

"Yes, when it is well played. But those who play it badly, male or female, are the most rabid to perform upon it. You may be sure I was careful not to have it taught to my daughter. She wanted to learn music and I told her to learn the cornet; it is infinitely less common than the piano, especially for a woman."

"But it's not half so pleasing. Wait! I have the five hundred for my trick."

"If my son refuses to marry Mademoiselle de Boissalé I shall give him no more money, and we'll see how he'll manage to live."

"And your charming daughter Diana, are you arranging for her marriage also?"

"As for my daughter, I can give her nothing but praise; she is gentle, modest, obedient; there is no fear that she will ever oppose her father or hesitate to obey his slightest wish. Why, she is nearly eighteen years old and still amuses herself as if she were a child, with a doll or in cutting out figures in paper. There's no need to hurry her marriage, she has not the very slightest idea what love is, she is innocence personified, you could easily make her believe that children grow under cabbages."

"Take your card. I spoke of your daughter's marriage because I thought, and my wife also had noticed, that M. Marcelin, your son's young friend who has come back from Paris, was very assiduous in his attentions to your daughter; he seems to be

quite in love with her, and I thought — I score with four."

"M. Marcelin Nigelle marry my daughter! there's not the slightest danger of that."

"Why isn't there any danger of it? The young man is a very handsome fellow, his family is honorable, he has a sufficient fortune — in what way would it be a bad match?"

"In what way? Why, he would make my daughter unhappy; I am sure of it. He has been to Paris, he was very intimate with my son, and knows the same people; he went with him to balls, fêtes, courted the damsels whose trade it is to ruin young men — those whom to-day they call 'cocottes.'"

"That is nothing but the history of youth, and every day will cure him of the delightful defect of being young."

"If that were all he had done, I could perhaps excuse him; but there is something else that I cannot forgive him, that I shall never forgive him for."

"Take your card, then. And what is this frightful deed for which you can't bring yourself to forgive poor M. Marcelin?"

"He's fought, my dear fellow, fought a duel."

"Well, what of that?"

"What of that, do you say? do you mean to tell me you approve of duels?"

"I neither approve nor condemn them, it depends wholly on circumstances; sometimes a man is obliged to fight."

"Never, Plantureau, never. There are no circumstances, reasons, that can oblige a man, unless he is a soldier, to fight against another man, to try to kill some one in the flush of health and strength, or to get killed himself. Ah, upon that question I am immovable, no duellist shall ever enter my family, that he may leave his wife a widow when she least expects it. When people are ill one sees them going little by little, one expects to lose them, that's all very well; but a young man leaves his home, well and hearty, to go and fire a pistol or draw a sword, and two hours later he's brought back to you dead or dying. And you think that's all right, do you?"

"What is one to do when he is insulted?"

"A man should fight with the weapons given him by nature, his hands and feet; they rarely kill."

"Why, those are ragpickers' weapons."

"What do I care for that? Then, all men are ragpickers, since they all have their weapons at their disposition. I assure you, Plantureau, you can't change my ideas in regard to duels, and I repeat, no duellist shall ever enter my family. Thank God! I haven't to reproach my son with that crime. I don't think he is quarrelsome."

"And how do you know that young Marcelin has had a duel?"

"Because my son spoke to him about it before me once, and that idiotic Eugène almost complimented him upon it. Oh, those young men!"

"Wait, I make fifteen hundred, I have won the game."

"Oh, so you have, you spoke to me of my son and that distracted me. When one is playing cards he ought to mind his play. Bezique is a very stupid game, as you say, but it requires close attention, nevertheless. You'll give me my revenge, of course?"

Just as these gentlemen were beginning their new game, a young girl came suddenly into the room where they were playing. This was Mademoiselle Friquette, who was nineteen years of age and scarcely looked fifteen because she was very short and slender, and her dress, which wavered between that of the city and that of the country, made her look like a schoolgirl. Friquette was a very pleasing little person: her black eyes, though not large, were full of mischief; her face was round, her cheeks fresh and rosy; her nose was turned up just enough to give her a slightly saucy expression; her mouth was fresh and smiling, though rather large, but her teeth were good; finally, her forehead was high and her brown hair made a pretty frame for it. You will quite understand that this little maid was not a person who was likely to frighten one away.

Friquette was well-built, had a good figure, but her thick homespun skirt could not be said to set it off; however, the said skirt was short enough to show a well-turned ankle and indications of a

calf that would not fail to pass muster, and also a small finely arched foot, which, however, was always engulfed in heavy shoes or in sabots. For Mademoiselle Friquette was simply a servant-maid, and lady's maid also to young Diana.

M. Belatout had in his service a young man of twenty named Jacquet, who was as stupid as Mademoiselle Friquette was sharp and clever. To complete his household, M. Belatout had also a cook; but this latter was now very old, she had been in the service of M. Belatout's father, and had almost brought the former up. She was therefore stationary in the house, like those old pieces of furniture which are of hardly any use, but which are carefully kept and preserved until time has demolished them.

It was very different with little Friquette. While appearing to be only in mademoiselle's service, it was she who managed everything, saw that everything was done in the house, who superintended the others, who saw that nothing was neglected and who often even recalled to her master what he had to do throughout the day. She had a very submissive expression withal, and did all this without seeming to interfere. Her voice was always gentle and insinuating and you were drawn into doing what she wanted, while she seemed only to be obeying you. But this young girl also possessed what is most rare, that which one meets so seldom in society; that which riches, the greatest

fortune does not give; that which no one can learn; even though he becomes a savant; that which chance alone gives us, and which may be found in a village as well as in a city; that which is prized, admired, and sought after in all countries; that which is desired by some, envied by others, and often renders those who possess it unfortunate; that which, and herein is its greatest charm, never grows old, which braves time and after our death causes us to be remembered;—in one word, Friquette had intellect, wit.

"Wait! here's Friquette, my daughter's little maid," said Belatout. "What do you want, little one? have you something to ask of me? for I have to know everything that's going on in the house. Ah, if a master's eye were not always there, nothing would go as it ought, nothing would get done. My old Marianne's no longer good for anything but to attend to her pots and kettles, my daughter is a child, my valet Jacquet is the most unheard-of simpleton. Friquette here is obedient enough, but I have to tell her what she has to do. Oh, my poor Ursule! where are you now? Let me see what Friquette wants?"

The little maid, who had smiled slightly at her master's words, answered,—

"It is only this letter, monsieur, which the postman left for you. I brought it up at once, because it seemed to me by the writing that it was from monsieur's son."

"Why, really! and you can recognize writing, can you?"

"Oh, that's not at all difficult to do."

"Yes, it is from my son; it's to tell me he's coming home, the heedless fellow. You'll allow me to read it, Plantureau."

"Certainly, don't let me restrain you. I'll be puzzling out my new invention."

M. Belatout opened his son's letter and read it aloud: —

My Dear Father: — I shall be with you the day after tomorrow — Thursday [that is tomorrow then]. I hope to find everybody in the house in good health. As for me, I am as stout as the Porte Saint-Denis, it is not merely for the sake of writing it that I put that in. Kill the fatted calf and bring out your Corton wine which I am so fond of, for I am in the mood to make merry. [He's in the mood to drink of my best, that is fortunate.] Tell my sister that I am bringing her a new foulard, the handsomest one to be had at a moderate price. Shake hands with my friend Marcelin for me [Yes, catch me at it!] and chuck Friquette under the chin [I'll leave that to you!] Oh, and remind old Marianne that I am exceedingly fond of bread pudding, and ask her to make some against I come. [See that, will you? He orders his dinner immediately; nothing embarrasses this gentleman.] Vale et me ama, toto corde.

Eugène.

"Oh, how delightful, M. Eugène is coming tomorrow!" exclaimed Friquette, jumping for joy.

"Ah, my son amuses you because he turns everything upside down in the house."

"Mercy! he's alway singing and laughing; but you are very cheerful also, master."

"I am cheerful — certainly, when I am in good temper."

"Then you'll have a whole lot of people to dinner tomorrow, to celebrate your son's return?"

"People to dinner to celebrate my son's return, when he has been spending all his money in Paris, with hussies and tipsy fellows of his own kind? No, really, I don't see the necessity of it. If my son had only given me some satisfaction, that would be different; but he hasn't done so, and why should I make merry at his return? No, this time, my mind is made up."

"Well, this is all I have to say; it's just as monsieur wishes of course! — but when one invites nobody, he must drink his good wine all alone, that's all."

"All alone, good wine needs to be appreciated by connoisseurs. Plantureau, have you drunk any of my Corton wine?"

"Hey! what did you say? Pardon me, I was thinking of my invention."

"I asked you if you'd ever drunk any of my Corton wine?"

"No, I believe not; I don't remember having done so."

"Well, come to dinner tomorrow, and I'll give you some."

"Willingly, very willingly — with my wife?"

"Of course!"

"One man who is very knowing about wines,"

said Friquette, "is M. Potard, the former registrar."

"How do you know that, Friquette?"

"Why I've often heard you say so, master."

"Yes, that's true, Potard is a real connoisseur. I'll get him to come to dinner tomorrow; I should like to have his opinion."

"Then there's M. Boulinot and his wife," resumed Friquette, "if you listened to those people you'd think they had everything better than anybody else, and the best cellar in the country."

"They say that, but it is not true; I should like to outdo them tomorrow. I shall invite them; you shall show them my old chambertin and my champagne Rozey, they have nothing like that to offer me."

"Your champagne Rozey! what, that wine that Madame Fleurinard likes so much, she said she'd commit any folly to have champagne Rozey."

"That's true; that pleasing widow of three husbands! she sings when she has drunk champagne. I'll invite her, she'll make us laugh."

"Then there's the Triffouille family; monsieur must owe them a dinner."

"The Triffouilles? ah, that's true, I dined with them at the baptism of their last little one. See, there are four of them — the father and mother and two young ladies."

"The two young ladies are very intimate with Mademoiselle Diana."

"They're my daughter's friends, are they? Yes, in fact, I might as well have them tomorrow as any day, it will be a dinner returned."

"While you are about it, you'll invite your son's friend, M. Marcelin, I suppose, monsieur?"

"M. Marcelin, and why should I invite him? I'm not at all inclined to give my son so much satisfaction."

"I suggested it because M. Marcelin has a very pretty voice, he can sing some songs, and after dinner that will amuse."

"He might join us in the evening, I've nothing to say against that."

"That is true, he could come in the evening. Only I've noticed that monsieur will have thirteen at the table and that would deprive a good many people of appetite."

"Thirteen at table, do you think so?"

"Count them, monsieur."

"Let's see; you, Plantureau, with your wife."

"Without my wife, if you like."

"The idea of such a thing! I am incapable of slighting her in such a manner. Then there's Potard, the Boulinots, widow Fleurinard, the Triffouille family, four, that makes ten; myself, my daughter, my son. By Jove she's right, we shall be thirteen."

"And one of the thirteen always dies first, don't they, monsieur?"

"You mean to say one of them dies within the

year. But only weak-minded people believe that; all the same, I will invite Marcelin to come as the fourteenth, that at least won't bring any future consequences. Now, Friquette, you understand what I mean; tell Marianne that I must have a dinner for fourteen persons tomorrow, and she must arrange accordingly. You will help her, lend her a hand. I will send Jacquet fishing, so we may have some trout."

"Oh, monsieur, if you trust to Jacquet for fish you know very well you'll go without them. The last time he was more than six hours fishing and he only brought home a little dead rabbit, that he'd found at the bottom of the water."

"Yes, and as I remember he was very proud of having caught a rabbit."

"M. Marcelin is a very skillful fisherman, he often gives you some trout."

"Ah, I'd forgotten him. Well, if you see him, invite him to do a little fishing tomorrow."

"Yes, monsieur, oh, I'm sure to see him soon — by chance, he very often passes our house; and at the same time I'll tell him that you expect him to dinner tomorrow."

"Of course, of course. See, Friquette, that my orders are exactly followed, and above all that none of them are misconstrued."

"You may rest assured, monsieur; you know that I never disobey you."

Friquette departed, and M. Belatout, turning

towards his friend Plantureau, exclaimed pompously,—

"Look you, Plantureau, this is what it is to be the master of one's own house, and to have one's wishes respected."

CHAPTER II

Mademoiselle Diana. Return of the Prodigal Son

Friquette on leaving her master immediately hastened to her young mistress, who was in her own room busily engaged in ravelling out various pieces of colored silk.

Mademoiselle Diana was almost eighteen years old. She was fair, with languorous blue eyes — but no, we are going too fast, up to the present they were only shy, but they were the kind of eyes that become languorous when their owner's heart begins to beat for some one else, but it must be confessed that the lovely cerulean orbs of this charming young person already assumed a softer expression when her brother's friend, M. Marcelin, was with her. Diana Belatout had a pretty figure, just above medium height. She was well-made, slender rather than thin, but if she had been fat at eighteen just imagine what a ball she would have been at thirty. Everything must await its proper time, and avoirdupois, like other things that we would willingly avoid, almost always comes too soon.

Diana, who was fond of music, had had a great

desire to learn to play the piano, but M. Belatout detested that instrument. It must, however, be admitted that since he had been old enough to go into society he had heard it played in all the houses at which he visited in the circle in which he moved; all the young ladies played the piano, and every evening in every gathering they were anxious to show their talent and parade their progress or play the last new piece that had come from Paris. This had resulted in Belatout's having a great aversion for it, and before going out in the evening he would hermetically seal his ears with cotton; but this caused him some inconvenience, for if he could not hear the piano neither did he hear when any one spoke to him. Then every one said,—

"What a pity about that young Belatout; he's getting as deaf as an adder."

Belatout of course heard this, for plug one's ears as closely as one may, the malicious things that are said about us are the things we always hear the most easily. So he gave up the cotton. At length he had married a young lady who was passably plain, but he had made quite sure beforehand that she did not play the instrument which had so often tormented him.

I think Belatout was quite excusable; generally speaking, it is with the piano as with virtue or eel-pie, "a little of it goes a long way."

M. Belatout had flatly refused his daughter

when she had asked him to let her have a master for the piano. But to console her he had said,—

"Since you are so anxious to learn music, to play some instrument, learn the cornet. It is pleasing and not at all common, and can be heard from a distance. And one can't be playing it all day long, that is another advantage."

Diana had timidly answered,—

"I thought, father, the cornet was played only by men."

"My dearest," papa had answered, "I confess that I have seen a cornet in a man's hands, but it is not prohibited to the fair sex. You will be doing something that others don't do, and that will be all the more distinguished. I've seen women play the violin and the flute, and even the horn, and become very proficient on those instruments too. I don't see what should prevent them from playing the cornet."

So you know how it came about that the gentle and timid Diana played the cornet like a member of a regimental band. But having no talent for that instrument she had not become proficient in playing it, and her repertory was limited to two or three pieces. M. Belatout thought that was quite enough.

Little Friquette was very fond of her young mistress, and was always seeking to do something that would please her; she had noticed how little pleasure she experienced in blowing her cornet, but as

she noticed everything she also saw that Diana looked happier and chatted more freely when M. Marcelin came to her father's house, and further than that she blushed and smiled when that young man talked with her, while she pouted or hardly answered when any other gentleman tried to say amiable things to her, those little complimentary phrases with which the men try to make themselves welcome to the young ladies. Friquette had easily guessed what all this meant, and, being a girl who had some reasoning powers, she said to herself,—

" M. Marcelin likes to come very much during the daytime or on those evenings when M. Belatout is not in, for then he finds mademoiselle alone in the drawing-room and has a chance to talk to her; on the other hand, mademoiselle is pleased when he pays these visits. It seems to me that a very simple way of letting M. Marcelin know when my master has gone out would be to get Mademoiselle Diana to play the cornet, which can be heard in the street, and to make it safer I will come to an understanding with M. Marcelin as to what air shall be played when M. Belatout is not here; if that is done he will never make a mistake about it. Mamzelle shall give the signal herself, and I shall tell her I think it is the tune she knows the best and beg her to play it for me. I must be very careful not to let her know that it is a signal to M. Marcelin to come, or else she would

most likely never dare to breathe into her cornet again, but with timid people one has to have mischief for two."

And this is how, in obliging his daughter to learn the cornet instead of the piano, M. Belatout had furnished her with a means of corresponding with her lover. La Fontaine was right when he wrote, "One should never contrive at all."

Friquette ran to her mistress, exclaiming,—

"Mademoiselle, rejoice! Your brother will be here tomorrow. He has written to your papa, who has just read the letter — and he stopped a game of bezique to do it."

"Is it really true that my brother is coming to-morrow? You are quite sure of it, Friquette?"

"Didn't I hear your father read the letter before me and that big canary, M. Plantureau? You know him, the inventor, the one who is always inventing something that will make him a millionnaire, while his wife says he will bring her to poverty with his inventions."

"Oh, how pleased I shall be to see Eugène! But is he going to stay with us this time?"

"Goodness, he didn't say anything about that in his letter. I think myself that M. Eugène likes Paris better than Bar-le-Duc, despite our trout and our jams. But that isn't all, mademoiselle. Tomorrow you will have a great deal of company to dinner to welcome your brother home. There will be fourteen of you."

"Fourteen! and do you know whom my father has invited to this dinner?"

"I should think I did know, indeed. At first he didn't want to have anybody. That would not have been either cheerful or pleasant for your brother. But I wanted him to have some company. I thought you would like it."

"Oh, yes; and do you know if my father has invited my brother's friend, M. Marcelin?"

"He had no idea of doing so, but I managed it so that without him there would only have been thirteen. Then he said invite M. Marcelin."

"Ah, Friquette, you are very clever. You always manage to do everything you set out to do. That poor young man; he's my brother's intimate friend, and Eugène would have been so vexed if he had not been invited to the dinner."

"Certainly he would, mamzelle."

At this point the conversation of the two young girls was interrupted by the entrance of Jacquet, M. Belatout's valet, who was a great booby of twenty, who dared not look a woman in the face and who turned almost purple when a young girl barely said a word to him. Jacquet was tall, well-built, and might have been a fine fellow if he had not been such a blockhead, and his china-blue goggle eyes nearly always seemed to be searching the skies for a balloon.

"Excuse me, Mamzelle Diana, for coming into your room without your ringing for me," said

Jacquet. "I didn't come for you; I was looking for Friquette, I must speak to her at once."

"Well, why don't you speak? What have you got to say to me that's important enough to bring you to my mistress's room in search of me? Why don't you answer, you great simpleton?"

"In the first place, I beg you not to call me simpleton instead of Jacquet. I don't like people to call me out of my name."

"Oh, it's a pity about you. Don't be afraid, no one will call you out of your name."

"I always call you Friquette, I don't call you Blanquette."

"Call me what you like, it won't vex me! But come, tell me what you want of me."

"Master said to me: 'Go and tell Friquette that she need not invite M. Marcelin to make the fourteenth at table. I had forgotten M. Grandbec, a charming bachelor whom I hold in great esteem; he shall be the fourteenth. I infinitely prefer him to M. Marcelin. Go at once and tell Friquette.'"

The little servant frowned and looked at her young mistress, who pouted, then she answered Jacquet,—

"Did master say that?"

"Yes, and he seemed very pleased at having M. Grandbec for his fourteenth. I said to him, 'Monsieur, if you had need of any one I would have willingly been your fourteenth.' He laughed and went out to give his invitations."

"He's gone—you are sure monsieur has gone?"

"Certainly, with his friend, M. Plantureau, who tumbled down in the court as he was saying, 'I am going to invent something to take the place of walking-sticks.'"

But Friquette was not listening to Jacquet, she was whispering to Diana,—

"Mamzelle, please take your cornet and play the tune of 'I go tomorrow; I must leave Marie.'"

"You always want that tune."

"Yes, mamzelle, you play it so well; I like it so much, and M. Marcelin is infatuated with it."

Diana did as her maid requested her, perhaps without being quite aware that it was a signal; the timid young girl had noticed that her brother's friend always came when she played it. The most innocent damsel displays a little craft on certain occasions.

As to Jacquet, hardly had he heard the first bars of the refrain than he went towards the door, saying,—

"I don't believe our young mistress knows how to play anything but that one tune."

But Friquette ran after him and stopped him.

"Where are you going?" said she.

"A-fishing. Master said to me, 'As we can't ask M. Marcelin to fish, you will go, and you will bring me trout and not rabbit.' That's a good joke, for master to think I always catch rabbits. Why, they are a good deal rarer than fish."

"And you're going without knowing what answer to make to him in regard to the message you brought?"

"The answer — is there an answer to it?"

"Of course. When you see M. Belatout you'll say to him, 'Monsieur, it was too late. Friquette has already seen M. Marcelin and asked him to dinner tomorrow. You will have two fourteenths, that's all.'"

"Then that will be twenty-eight."

"Let it be what it will, it doesn't concern you."

"Is it still necessary for me to go a-fishing?"

"Oh, yes, you may go; all the fish you'll catch won't choke anyone."

When Jacquet had gone, Diana exclaimed,—

"You said, Friquette, that you'd already invited M. Marcelin, but it isn't true, for you haven't seen him yet."

"But I'm going to see him very shortly and I shall give him his invitation; it's the same thing. Do you mean to say that you would rather have M. Grandbec beside you at the table?"

"Oh, no, Friquette, I don't like him at all. For a young man he is too serious; I have never seen him laugh. He has such a sly expression when he looks at one; his voice is honey and he speaks so slowly one would think he was afraid of dropping a word too much."

"Then I don't think you would be pleased if they were to give him to you for a husband."

"For a husband? Why, what makes you say that, Friquette? You frighten me; no, I certainly don't want to marry M. Jules Grandbec! But where did you get such a horrible idea?"

"Goodness, mamzelle, it's because without seeming to do so I notice everything that's going on and hear all that is said; what are one's eyes for if one mustn't use them? I have often heard your father praising M. Grandbec and saying, 'There's a wise, steady, economical young man. I wish my son Eugène had taken pattern by him; he only plays loto at a sou a box, he never takes what these gentlemen call "a drop too much," he has no love affairs, he never fights duels, has some fortune and will some day be a notary. He's just the kind of a husband I want to find for my daughter.'"

"Good heavens! did my father say that?"

"Yes, mamzelle, and when he said, 'I must find her a husband like that,' M. Belatout smiled and rubbed his hands as much as to say, 'Here he is, all ready to my hand!'"

"You make me shudder; that would be frightful. And M. Marcelin hasn't come."

"Play the cornet, mamzelle, play."

Diana began her tune again, but she was only half-way through it when a young man darted precipitately into the room, exclaiming,—

"How well you play, mademoiselle."

It was the one whom they expected, Marcelin Nigelle, a very pleasing young man, very well-built,

cheerful, lively, rather hasty, but at bottom sensible and good. He was a medical student, or rather a young doctor, for he had received his degree; if he did not practise it was only because, being only twenty-six, he wished to pursue his studies further, in order that he might be more certain of curing his patients. In fact he wished to learn more of the theory of medicine before practising it. This was owing to his modesty; but as people are rarely willing to believe in the modesty of others, they said, "This young man wants to live a life of pleasure." It is nearly always thus that the world judges.

Diana, who blushed deeply when Marcelin came in, hastened to lay down her instrument and murmured,—

"Good-day, monsieur, do you really think that I have made progress? But I don't care much for playing my cornet."

"You are wrong, mademoiselle. I am extraordinarily fond of it, especially when you play it."

"It's not a matter of the cornet just now!" exclaimed Friquette. "Mamzelle, tell him that your brother comes tomorrow, that M. Belatout is giving a grand dinner to welcome him, and that monsieur is himself invited to dinner."

"Is it possible! Eugène is coming from Paris tomorrow?"

"Yes, monsieur, my brother has written to papa to announce his return. I am very much pleased."

"And I am delighted. But this invitation from your father, who has evinced so little liking for me! Has he got over his prejudice against me? What luck, indeed! I shall take care to profit by his fortunate disposition towards me. I have something to ask of him, something upon which all my future happiness depends. He has treated me so coldly that up to the present I have not dared to do it; but he's invited me to dinner and that gives me hope."

"Don't flatter yourself so quickly, monsieur," said Friquette. "This invitation did not come of itself from M. Belatout. I had to manage very skillfully to obtain it for you, and after he had charged me to invite you, didn't master revise his list and send Jacquet to tell me that M. Grandbec would make the fourteenth instead of you — isn't that so, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, my father changed his mind."

"Well, am I invited or am I not? for I don't know where I stand."

"Yes, yes, you are invited, for I told Jacquet to say to his master that I had already given you the invitation and that it was too late to recede."

"Oh, Friquette, how kind you are! and you are so clever."

"But I also told him that I had asked you to go fishing and to try and let us have some trout for tomorrow; they will make you more welcome."

"I shall have some, never fear, I'll bring some.

I'll go fishing at once, for I want M. Belatout to be in a good-humor. I'll go and get a line, for I must not lose any time, must I, mademoiselle?"

But just as he was going, Diana stopped the young man by a sigh, and said to him, with downcast eyes,—

"M. Marcelin, what is it that you wish to ask my father that will make you happy?"

Marcelin took Diana's hand, pressed it tenderly in his own and answered in a low voice,—

"Can you not imagine what I wish to ask him? what will make my happiness?"

"Why, no, I can't imagine what it can be."

"Well, I'll wager, I know what it is," said Friquette, looking as if she were not listening.

"Mademoiselle, if I have not dared to tell you, I think my eyes must have spoken for me. I hoped you would have understood, that you would know how much I love you. In fact I even dared to hope that my love was not displeasing to you. I was mistaken, though, I suppose?"

"Oh, I don't say that, monsieur."

"Then you will allow me to ask your father for your hand? It will not displease you if he consents to have me for a son-in-law?"

"Quite the contrary — I meant to say — I hardly know what I am saying — I am ashamed—"

"Dear Diana, you have made me very happy; don't retract your sweet avowal nor fear to let me know your heart."

"But you must go a-fishing, monsieur, you must go a-fishing; if you want master to give you a hearty welcome you must bring him some trout. Mamzelle is willing to be your wife, as you know, but if you want to get her you'll have to please monsieur."

"Yes, yes, you are right, Friquette, and I will go and fish. Oh, I'll get some trout if I have to go to the bottom of the water for them."

"Why, no, M. Marcelin, you mustn't throw yourself into the water. I don't wish you to do that."

"Don't be afraid, dear Diana, love will protect me. I'm off to fish. Tomorrow, no, presently, I'll bring my spoils to you."

In his joy the young man kissed Diana's hand several times and hugged Friquette before he departed. The latter began to laugh and said,—

"He made a mistake, he took me for you. He's very lively, very impatient, this lover of yours, mamzelle, and you are so timid, so fearful. But all the same you will make a good pair, because water and fire will mingle as well as water and wine."

Belatout passed his whole morning in giving his invitations for the grand dinner he was to have on the next day; he did not come in until dinner-time. But his first care was to call Jacquet and to ask him if he had conveyed to Friquette her master's decision. Jacquet immediately informed his

master of the answer the young girl had given him, "That it was too late, and that M. Marcelin was already invited."

"Too late," exclaimed Belatout, "too late! why, Friquette had hardly left me when I sent you to give her that order. You didn't go to her at once, you idiot!"

"Indeed I did, monsieur; I didn't even stop to use my handkerchief."

"Go and find Friquette, and tell her I want to speak to her at once. Immediately, do you understand?"

"Yes, monsieur, and if she doesn't come, I'll carry her."

Friquette prepared to obey her master's order; but as she guessed what he was going to say to her, she was careful to take from the kitchen something which she covered with her apron. Thus she boldly presented herself to M. Belatout, who said to her in a very dry tone,—

"What does this mean, Friquette? how comes it that you no longer obey my orders?"

"Me, monsieur? Oh, the idea! when have I ever disobeyed you?"

"I sent Jacquet to tell you that there was no need of inviting M. Marcelin, that I had some one else to make up fourteen; and I can't comprehend, even now, how I could have forgotten that estimable M. Grandbec. How came you to answer Jacquet that it was too late? that M. Marcelin was

already invited? and you had hardly left me? How could you have spoken to M. Marcelin so quickly?"

"It was very simple, master. When I left you I saw the young man, who was passing along the street. So I ran up to him and said, 'M. Belatout begs you to come to dinner with him tomorrow; your friend, his son, will be home.'"

"You were very anxious to do this errand."

"I am always anxious to do what you tell me to do, master. M. Marcelin accepted gladly. Oh, he was very much pleased."

"That's quite possible; but I should have been much better pleased not to have him. He's one of my son's friends, yes; but in Paris he gave him only bad advice and set him a bad example."

"Why, it is six months at least since M. Marcelin returned to Bar-le-Duc, and M. Eugène has stayed in Paris — he can't give him bad advice now. Everybody speaks well of young Doctor Marcelin."

"Doctor, a fine doctor, who attends nobody. Come, now, do you know any one he has cured?"

"Mercy! no, monsieur, but then I don't know anybody he has killed either."

"Oh, he'll kill somebody yet, never fear; for not only has he taken his degree as a doctor, but he's a duellist, too."

"Yes, and he's a famous fisherman also. Look at these, if you doubt my word."

So saying, Friquette uncovered what she held under her apron and displayed several fine large trout, still alive.

"What have you got there?"

"Mercy, monsieur, don't you see these are trout, and the finest ones of their kind?"

"Why, yes, yes, they are fine trout, indeed. Did Jacquet catch them?"

"Jacquet, I dare say, indeed. Do you know what he caught when he went fishing today? — a cat, a poor little cat that had been thrown into the water, no doubt."

"What, he's fishing for cats now, is he?"

"Offer that to your guests with some sauce à la Genevoise, such as Marianne makes so well. I asked M. Marcelin to fish for us, and he brought me those just now."

"Oh, M. Marcelin caught them."

"Aren't they fine, master; they'll make you a famous dish for tomorrow."

"Yes, I confess that these trout will make a fine show on my table."

"You are not sorry that you invited M. Marcelin now, are you?"

"It is certain that sauce will make anything pass — no, this time it is the fish that makes everything pass. Friquette, tell Marianne that I expect her to surpass herself tomorrow; we must have an excellent dinner."

"Yes, monsieur, be quite easy about that, every-

thing must correspond with the trout, they are such beautiful fish."

The little maid ran and whispered to her young mistress,—

"Your papa is not angry because M. Marcelin is coming to dinner tomorrow; the trout have done their work, M. Belatout is awfully fond of them; I was sure they'd put him in good-humor."

"Then you think, Friquette, that my father will welcome M. Marcelin kindly — and will consent that I should be his wife?"

"Why, mademoiselle, that is quite another matter, that's another thing to an invitation to dinner. We should have to find a famous big fish to get him to give his consent to that."

The day after this, at eleven o'clock in the morning, a young man, followed by a porter carrying a travelling bag and a small valise, came to M. Belatout's premises, paid his porter and sent him away, then stopped before the flight of steps shouting,—

"Here am I! What ho! the house! Is there nobody here? Is no one going to fire a few shots from a gun in my honor? is no one going to make me an offering of flowers? or sing a glad chorus of welcome?"

But Friquette had already come running followed by Diana, and finally M. Belatout appeared at the top of the steps, where he assumed a dignified posture as he said,—

"Oh, so it's you who are making all this rumpus? You are still just as noisy a fellow as ever and just as much of a mischievous urchin?"

"Yes, dear papa, you have indeed said truly. I am unchanged; still as gay, as cheerful, as pretty a fellow as ever. I am still the same son of whom you ought to be so proud. But let's have a kiss."

And Eugène, who had uttered all this laughingly, for he knew he was not a pretty fellow and had not the slightest pretension to being one, not that this detracted from his power of pleasing, because he had an agreeable and witty countenance, and was always ready to laugh — Eugène kissed his father, his sister, lightly tapped Friquette's fresh cheek and was about to enter the house when a slight detonation was heard, followed by a shout.

"What is that noise?" demanded M. Belatout.

"If some one let that off in my honor," said Eugène, "it's a small tribute, but I am much pleased with it."

"I recognize Jacquet's voice," said Diana.

In fact, they saw Jacquet approaching; he was groaning and holding his head, one of his eyes was black, and his face was smeared with powder.

"Why, it's that idiot of a Jacquet," said Eugène. "What has happened to you, my boy? Have you become a pyrotechnist?"

"M. Eugène, in honor of your return I wanted to let off some bombs; but you see what happened to me with the first."

"Yes, and I will excuse you from letting off the others. But your intentions were good, all the same, and by and by I'll recompense you. But I am dying of hunger."

"Come along and have some breakfast, you saucy fellow."

Despite the dignified air that he tried to assume, M. Belatout was nevertheless pleased to see his son, who had been absent from Bar-le-Duc for two years. He contemplated him with a certain pride and said to him,—

"It seems to me that you have grown."

"And grown handsomer, have I not, papa?"

"Handsomer! oh, your face hasn't changed, but you look well, and I see that you have a good appetite."

"Immense. I'm one of the best trenchermen in Paris."

"Oh! you are a trencherman?"

"I can gobble a dozen oysters in the wink of an eyelid."

"You gobble oysters, do you? Well, here we swallow them without gobbling."

"But you're letting me eat alone. Have you others breakfasted already?"

"We always breakfast at ten, as regular as the clock."

"My little sister has grown, filled out; she is a woman now. You must soon find her a husband, my dear father."

"You may be tranquil on that head. I shan't forget that."

"If you like I'll tell you of some one who would be charmed —"

"Thank you, no! a son-in-law of your choosing would inspire me with little confidence."

"Why, how inflexible you are in all that concerns me."

"I know well what I have to do for you and your sister, for you also must marry shortly; that will bring you to a more reasonable frame of mind."

"Do you think so? I am not entirely persuaded as to that! However, if you should offer me a Venus, a Galatea, or even a Hebe, I might think of it."

"Very well, very well — we'll speak of that later on."

"You must not eat too hearty a breakfast, brother, because we are going to have a big dinner today and I want you to do it honor."

"Be quite easy on that score, my dear sister, your brother has a fine capacity for food. A good breakfast never prevents me from dining well; on the contrary, it gives me a good appetite."

"Monsieur will eat some trout caught by his friend Marcelin," said Friquette as she served her young master.

"Dear old Marcelin! I shall be delighted to see him again. Is he well?"

"Yes, brother. You will see him at dinner

today; my father has invited him to celebrate your return."

"Why, that was very good of you, my dear father, to invite my friend."

"Oh, I invited him because — that is to say. Well, the fact is, I invited him — "

"Does he practise medicine here? Has he a good many patrons? Has he killed many people yet? — cured, I mean?"

"Your dear friend does nothing at all but stroll about, ride on horseback, amuse himself."

"Why, I tell you he is well off enough to do nothing — he'll practise his profession later on."

"Oh, yes, you approve that of course; you are quite of the opinion that one should think of nothing but pleasure. But I think that in every rank of life a man should work, should seek to be useful to his country."

"What you say is admirable, my dear papa; but before reforming men you must let them sow their wild oats, one can't be inoculated for wisdom as one is for the small-pox, which is extremely fortunate, for were it so one would have to be inoculated every few moments. But, my dear father, you were once a young man like me, did you never commit any follies?"

"Faith, no; no, indeed."

"Then opportunity must have been lacking. But if it should offer — beware!"

"Oh, there is not the least danger as to that;

I am a man of very determined principles. I am proof against every temptation."

"Well, I've done, I have breakfasted well. Now I'm going to change my clothing, make myself fine, and take a turn in the town that I may greet my acquaintances."

"That's right, get yourself up as well as possible; we shall have a good many people and I want you to do honor to the occasion."

Eugène rose and slipping his hand under his father's arm led him into the next room.

"But you know, oh, my author—"

"What do you mean by your author? What are you talking about?"

"I meant to say, my dear father, it's the same thing. You must know that I need a number of small articles for my toilet—for instance, I must have a toothbrush. I haven't a sou unless you open your purse to me. Come, do the thing well. Be generous, let me have a check for a thousand francs."

"What! you want a thousand francs to buy a toothbrush?"

"Oh, I shall buy other brushes too. In fact, I'm dead broke. I go into society and it is necessary that your son should live up to his position."

"Very well, I'm willing to give you what you ask of me on the condition that you show yourself obedient to my wishes, that you allow me to arrange a suitable marriage for you."

"Arrange as many as you like, my dear father, you will be highly satisfied with me."

M. Belatout took from his pocket-book a thousand-franc note which he gave to his son, and the latter, delighted at finding himself in funds, hastened to go and change his clothes.

As soon as he was dressed, Eugène's first act was to repair to his friend Marcelin's. The latter uttered an exclamation of joy on seeing him.

"Why, my dear Eugène!"

"Yes, my dear fellow, it is I, and I come to Bar-le-Duc like a whipped cat, for you know I like no place but Paris; in fact, my father insisted and as I hadn't a sou I had to come."

"Are you never going to be reasonable and settle down?"

"And what about yourself? They tell me you do nothing here but amuse yourself. If you can find amusement in a dull country town you are more than fortunate."

"Why, my dear fellow, the fact is, I'm in love with some one down here."

"In love! Why, one can be that anywhere. I've left two lovely charmers in Paris. First of all, Zozinette, a big, fair woman who knows how to smoke through her nose, who imbibes sherbets, and crunches up crabs' tails with the shells on. Oh, what a lively woman she is, such good company. Then there's Floreska, who is destined for the stage as a dancer, what a foot! what a leg! At

a dinner, after dessert, she always wants to dance on the table. You remember her, you have dined with her?"

"Possibly, but I have forgotten all that; I don't want to remember it, for I repeat to you I am in love and I want to marry — can you guess who?"

"As if I knew the beauties about here."

"Well Eugène, I love your sister, I adore her and I ardently desire to marry her."

"Pshaw, Diana! Well, come to think of it, she has grown to be rather a nice little thing. Well, that will suit me, that boot is on the right foot; you love my sister; I will give her to you, that's a settled thing."

"Hum! settled! not so quick as you think; your father's consent will be difficult to obtain."

"Why so? you are well educated, you have enough money, you've taken your degree as a doctor. You have no patients, but that only proves your fear of making blunders; and to sum up, you love my sister, there ought to be no difficulty about that."

"Why, you must know that your father can't forgive me for fighting a duel and having nearly killed my adversary. He's said several times — it was Friquette who told me — that a duellist should never enter his family."

"Oh, that'll be all right! People say so many things which mean nothing, and which they forget later on; my father won't be obdurate. Why, if

you take my advice, you ask his consent as soon as possible. I think the time is favorable, for my father has some idea of a marriage for me, he has spoken to me about it. Well, if he marries my sister also he will kill two birds with one stone."

"You are disposed to marry the person he has in view for you then?"

"If she is young and pretty, well-made and witty; otherwise, I shall skedaddle!"

"Hang it! don't talk like that before your father, that won't help our affairs."

"Don't be uneasy, I'll keep my valve shut."

"Again? don't you know that a young man who talks slang is very coldly received about here?"

"One mustn't laugh then?"

"Not in that way."

"Then I shall play dummy. By the way, I've obtained a bill for a thousand francs from papa and I'm going to buy some cigars. Oh, Zozinette, thou who smokest through thy nose, where art thou? I bet one could not find a woman here who can smoke?"

"Most certainly not!"

"How far behind they are in the provinces!"

CHAPTER III

A Refreshing Invention. The Hero of the Feast

Precisely on the stroke of four in the afternoon the guests began to arrive at M. Belatout's; for in the provinces they had not yet adopted the custom of sitting down to dinner at half-past seven or even at eight, as they do in Paris, which transforms the dinner into supper. At M. Belatout's they dined at five o'clock in the afternoon; a quarter of an hour's grace was accorded — no more, and this was only to the ladies; from the men a military promptitude was exacted and woe to him who infringed this rule.

Marcelin was the first to arrive, which was really due to his eagerness to see Diana though, as was perhaps natural, he referred his haste to his pleasure in meeting his friend Eugène. The fine trout he had sent had won for him a friendly enough welcome from the master of the house, who, however, could not refrain from remarking to his young guest in a slightly satirical tone,—

"No one can accuse you of being too late for dinner, young man, since you are the very first to arrive."

"My coming so early is perhaps an indiscretion on my part, monsieur?"

"Not at all! not at all, it is far better to be the first than to keep people waiting."

"And then," added Eugène, coming forward to shake hands with his friend, "it occurs to me that some one must always be the first to arrive, must they not, father?"

"Of course, unless several persons happen to come at the same time."

Diana said nothing, she merely blushed, as do all innocent, ingenuous young girls on seeing the person who has first touched their hearts. Later on the blush is not so quick, then comes a time when it does not appear at all; and that is a pity.

Closely following Marcelin came Monsieur and Madame Plantureau. Madame was a little, dark woman who had been very enticing and was now inclined to be rather provoking. For instance, she did not look as though she were madly in love with her husband and did not hesitate to shrug her shoulders when he talked of his inventions; but that did not prevent M. Plantureau, a big, fair man with hair as curly as a negro's from continually racking his head to discover something that would make him a millionnaire and, what he desired still further, hand down his name to posterity.

Upon this occasion the inventor came in beaming and rubbing his hands, as he habitually did when he thought he had discovered something

new. Madame Plantureau incessantly repeated that she always felt like crying when she saw her husband rubbing his hands, because she foresaw that he was going to take out a patent for his new invention.

The Plantureaus congratulated Eugène upon his return.

"It is a long time since you last came to see your father, is it not?" inquired madame.

"Two years, madame, and then I only stayed for ten days."

"And are we to have you with us longer this time?"

"I sincerely hope that he will not leave us again," exclaimed M. Belatout; "and that he will settle down in Bar-le-Duc. I have found a means of rendering him sensible."

"Oh, good heavens! are you turned inventor too?"

And the lady moved affrightedly away from M. Belatout, while her husband rubbed his hands, and remarked,—

"Here's my wife still up in arms against inventors, but patience! when she is rolling in her carriage she'll change her tune."

"I'm not so sure that you will make me roll in my carriage, monsieur; at any rate, while waiting for that I do know that our rooms are full of your inventions, which serve for no purpose but to make the house look like a junk shop."

"One is not always successful at the first trial, but it seems to me that one can stand some temporary disappointment when it is a question of handing down one's name to posterity."

"Posterity! what do I care about posterity? will that butter our parsnips?"

"Hold your tongue, Eulalie; you are talking blasphemy—"

"Not a bit of it, I'm talking logically; I say that before one works for posterity one must buy breeches and stockings."

The entrance of M. Potard put an end to this conjugal interlude. The ex-registrar was a fat man, always out of breath, who could not dispense with his snuff-box for two minutes at a time; he came in wiping his face.

"How do you do, ladies and gentlemen—I'm glad to see you. Ouf! how hot it is! over twenty-two degrees[1] and we are only in June—what a prospect for us. Why, here's the son and heir, M. Eugène. How d'ye do, young man, you haven't grown stouter."

"No, thank God!"

"Do you snuff?"

"Take snuff! no one takes snuff now, it's old fogyish; people smoke, everybody smokes."

"Ah, well, I'm an old fogy, then; for I take snuff and I don't smoke."

[1] Over twenty-two Réaumur would be between sixty-five and seventy degrees Fahrenheit.

"As for that, if it amuses you, why, by Jove! go your own gait."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean to say, do as it pleases you, and never mind what any one else does."

"Ha, ha! that's just exactly my way of thinking. Do you snuff?"

"I have just told you that I don't."

"Ah, so you did. Well, Belatout, so it's a question of judging of a certain Corton wine that you've just got in?"

"Yes, I know you are an adept in wines, and I thought of you at once."

"An adept and a connoisseur, I flatter myself, when it concerns wines there's no way of deceiving me either as to their quality or their age."

"Come, now, tell us, Papa Potard," exclaimed Eugène, "are you as great a connoisseur of women as of wine?"

"No, I can't flatter myself that I am."

"There is one way in which you may age them very quickly," said Plantureau, "and that is to bury them in sand."

"The women?"

"No, the bottles or demijohns of wine. As to women, they always get old quick enough."

"And what about the men?" retorted madame. "Do you imagine that you will remain ever young? These gentlemen are charming! they would like to make us think that time passes only for us."

The gentlemen were laughing very heartily at Madame Plantureau's thrust when M. Grandbec arrived; this latter was a tall, dry, yellow man, with owl's eyes and with a nose formed somewhat like the beak of that bird; he was but twenty-nine years of age and appeared forty. He carried himself as stiff as a rod, always affected a grave expression and only looked at people slyly; he walked with measured steps, spoke as he walked, bowed and then seated himself as if he were fitted with springs; on the stage he would have passed perfectly for a wooden man.

M. Belatout hastened towards this huge marionette and squeezed his hand effusively, while Eugène, who felt a great desire to laugh immoderately, whispered to Marcelin,—

"By Jove! what have we here? what is it? it looks like one of those jack-in-the-boxes made to scare children. Where in the world did my father buy such an ugly plaything as that?"

"My dear Eugène, this plaything, as you term him aptly enough, is M. Grandbec, who is devoting himself to the study of law. Your father has taken an extreme liking to him, because this Grandbec affects a great love for work and an exemplary wisdom, nor does he ever permit himself the smallest joke; in fact, no one can remember ever having seen him laugh."

"He's a cheerful addition to any society, he looks to me like a mute at a funeral. I'll promise

you he must make merry with me or I'll know the reason why."

M. Grandbec had returned M. Belatout's salutation with a stiff bow and a squeeze of the hand, and the latter led him towards Eugène, saying,—

"My dear M. Grandbec, allow me to present my son to you; you do not yet know him, because when he came to see us two years ago I had not the pleasure of your acquaintance."

M. Grandbec took a few steps towards Eugène, bowed to him and remarked gravely,—

"Really, monsieur, I shall be extremely flattered to have the honor of your acquaintance."

"And I yours," said Eugène smiling, "I assure you it will afford the greatest pleasure to 'Bibi!'"

M. Grandbec was so surprised at this speech that he thought he must have misunderstood, then he bowed slightly again and approaching Diana said,—

"So your brother's pet name was Bibi?"

"No, monsieur, my brother was baptized as Eugène only."

"Ah, but you know among friends people sometimes take another, a nickname. Your brother hasn't told you his yet; but it seems he has taken that of Bibi."

"Do you think so, monsieur?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, he told me so himself."

The Boulinot couple and Madame Fleurinard, the widow who had buried three husbands, now

joined the party. The Boulinots were retired tradespeople living in very easy circumstances, who imagined that everything was permissible to them because they had money. They were very fussy, thinking nothing good but what they bought themselves and nothing fine but what they wore. The husband in speaking continually used the possessive pronoun and made a great mouthful of saying, "My fortune, my estates, my table, my servants." Only it was noticed that he did not say "my" wife.

Madame was a trifle less egotistical. She said, "Our income, our people, our silver service, our famous wines," and in speaking to an intimate friend sometimes said, "our children."

The widow Fleurinard was forty-nine years old. She had had three husbands and still seemed to expect a fourth, but it was probable that her oglings and her expensive toilets would have no result.

"It is not that they think me too old," said Madame Fleurinard, "but they believe that I throw a fatal spell over my husbands and that deters them."

The Triffouille family's arrival completed the number of the guests. They were kind people who had a very remarkable claim to distinction — they never spoke ill of any one. And they were also held to be very stupid by most of their acquaintances. Be good, therefore, for that is what it will bring you.

The two Triffouille young ladies, girls of fifteen to sixteen years, ran and took possession of Diana and retired to a corner of the drawing-room to talk with her; you must have noticed that young girls have a great weakness for little corners.

M. Belatout presented his son to those of the guests with whom he was not acquainted. But the general conversation presently recurred to the heat which they were experiencing at that moment —the men perspired and frankly wiped their faces; the ladies asserted that they did not perspire, vanity would not let them confess it, they were red and glistening, but they would not use their handkerchiefs. They perhaps feared to disarrange their hair or — whisper it — the color of their cheeks.

"It is in the night that the heat is most overwhelming," said Potard, "even with the lightest coverings one is far too warm."

"I don't cover myself at all," said M. Boulinot, "I lie down on my bed in nature's garments only and throw myself about at my ease."

"If madame places herself beside you in the same state," said Eugène, "you must look like Adam and Eve."

"We don't sleep together," Madame Boulinot said; "we have separate rooms, thank God! for my husband snores in a manner that is perfectly deafening."

"That is my constitutional habit. I must snore, one way or another, or I should be ill."

"What is your other manner of snoring, M. Boulinot?" asked Eugène, laughing. But he received no answer.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Plantureau, advancing towards the middle of the drawing-room, "for a long time past in summer time people have complained of the heat which sometimes lasts for whole months, and nobody has yet sought a means of opposing this heat or even of defying it. Well, I have sought this means and I have found it."

"Really? Why, that is a most fortunate discovery."

"Come, explain to us, M. Plantureau!"

"Follow what I say carefully. In the first place, my invention is for use at night after one has gone to bed, for, as you have just remarked, it is at night that the heat is most insupportable, as it prevents one from sleeping."

"Yes, yes, it is most annoying at night!"

"This, then, is what I have invented — follow me carefully. First, a wooden roller as long as the width of an ordinary bedstead; to this roller are adapted two very large fans open to their full extent, one above and one below. The roller is then affixed to two wooden arms with sockets which have been attached to the wood of the bedstead, one on the right and one on the left; care must be taken that the arms which support the roller are towards the head of the bed. Here you have a roller, flanked by two fans, that are almost above

your head. It is now only a question of making it work, and this I have found a way to do by means of a very simple mechanism wound up like clockwork. As soon as you are in bed you wind your lamp—no, I mean to say your roller, which now begins to turn at a great rate, so fast indeed that the two fans suffice to afford you a continual supply of air; it goes for three hours without stopping. At the expiration of that period you rewind your spring and the roller resumes its operation. Well, what do you think of that?"

"It's very ingenious."

"It seems to me very well contrived."

"Permit me to remark," said M. Boulinot, "that I should be quite willing to be fanned a little—but if I were to go to sleep and your roller kept on fanning me it would cease to be agreeable to me. One must have air, but not too much of it—that would infallibly give me cold."

"In the first place, M. Boulinot, everybody does not, like you, lie down to sleep like a savage. It seems to me that one cannot but sleep better for having a constant supply of fresh air playing about his face or elsewhere."

"Could not the mechanism be stopped when one wanted to go to sleep?"

"No, it must turn until it has run down."

"It seems to me," said Madame Fleurinard, "that it would frighten me to see that roller and those great fans revolving over my head."

"One might have small ones if one wished."

"Doesn't it make a noise in turning?"

"Oh, a very slight, not at all an unpleasant sound, toc, toc, something like the sails of a windmill in diminuendo. Well, don't you think that my system of nocturnal ventilation will meet with great success?"

"Yes, indeed! yes, indeed!" answered the men, looking as if they thought quite otherwise.

As to the ladies they did not appear to approve of this new invention, which was intended to refresh their husbands so continually.

"As for myself," said Eugène, "I confess that when the weather is extremely hot I would just as soon go to sleep under a windmill."

"Tomorrow," continued Plantureau, "I shall order five or six hundred rollers; then I'll advertise and sell my invention."

"Good heavens!" muttered his wife, "are we going to have another roomful of his mechanisms? What am I going to do with all these rollers?"

"If needs be," said Eugène, "you can turn them into tin."

"Monsieur is served," said Friquette, putting her head in at the drawing-room door.

"Very well! Gentlemen, will you conduct the ladies to the table?"

When M. Belatout said, "conduct the ladies" M. Grandbec had advanced to offer his arm to Diana, but as that young man did everything with

measured deliberation, Marcelin had darted before him and he it was who led the pretty damsel to the dining-room. There they would still have liked to remain together, but it was not to be. M. Belatout had had the names of the guests placed at each cover, and Diana was between M. Boulinot and M. Grandbec. The lovers could not even touch each other by so much as the tip of a toe — a great resource at table when one is obliged to hide one's feelings; what passes under the table is often more interesting than what goes on above it.

M. Belatout was throned in great state between Mesdames Boulinot and Triffouille. Eugène had quickly changed his card so that he might sit beside the inventor's wife, who seemed to be in great need of consolation, especially since her husband had spoken of his cooling device.

The soup was eaten without anything being said except the customary phrases,—

"It is excellent."

"Perfect."

"I have never eaten better tapioca soup."

"I think it is a little salt," said M. Boulinot. "At home my cook always brings some to me to taste before serving; in that way I am sure of getting the proper proportion of salt and pepper."

"Had we known that sooner," said Eugène, "we might have sent M. Boulinot to the kitchen, where he could have tasted everything. But perhaps it is not too late as yet to do so."

"No, I thank you, I prefer to remain at the table," answered the big gentleman, who did not perceive that the son of the house was making a butt of him.

"There's some madeira I can recommend to you," said M. Belatout.

"Oh, it isn't necessary for you to recommend it to us," exclaimed Eugène, "the only fault I find with it is that the bottle is too small. Come, Madame Plantureau, won't you take a little madeira? It'll warm you up against all these draughts your husband is preparing for you."

"Yes, indeed, you are quite right. I shall need something to keep me warm."

"It's delicious madeira," said M. Grandbec, holding up his glass to look at his wine.

"What do you say about it, Potard?"

"Hum — yes; fairly good, a trifle fiery."

"This," said M. Boulinot, "do you call this madeira? it's a mixture of brandy and marsala, manufactured at Cette, probably — it's very different from the real thing. Now I can give you some genuine madeira that's been to India and back. Why if you were to drink some of that you'd see the difference!"

"Deuce take it, monsieur, there's a very simple way of allowing us to judge of the difference; send to your house for two or three bottles of it, and if it is as good as you say, I promise you I won't leave a taste of it."

M. Boulinot was embarrassed; he saw that he had to do with one who had some determination; the son of the house had put his foot down. The elder gentleman tried to withdraw from his predicament by saying,—

"Oh, no, I don't care to send to my house; besides, my people are gone out and perhaps, after all, my taste was at fault; give me some more madeira that I may be better able to judge."

M. Boulinot held his glass out to Eugène, but the latter hastened to pour some out for his fair neighbor and to fill his own glass to the brim.

"No, no," he said, "you thought it inferior, you shall have no more of it; it's a mixture manufactured at Cette and it will make you ill; as for me I am not afraid of mixtures, I will sacrifice myself and drink the rest of it."

M. Boulinot compressed his lips and drew his glass towards him saying,—

"After all, I don't affirm that I was right."

M. Belatout was not at all displeased that fat Boulinot should receive such a lesson, however, he thought his son's conduct a trifle free and said to him,—

"Eugène, you take the interests of my wine too much to heart. I don't wish that you should thus sacrifice yourself in emptying the bottles. For the matter of that, I invited M. Boulinot to partake of my Corton wine; it pleases me to think that he will render it justice."

The gentleman who was so hard to please said nothing. Plantureau hastily interposed,—

"I think there should be some infallible manner of judging whether wine is adulterated or no. I must look into that; I am sure I can find some method."

"Good heavens? my husband is going to invent something else now," said Eulalie to her neighbor.

"Do you know, fair lady," he answered, "that your husband is a deuce of a fellow for inventing; he ought to have made some innovations in love and invented a new way of expressing his flame."

"Do be quiet; you are making me blush; you've given me too much madeira, my cheeks are on fire."

"M. Plantureau will fan you."

Marcelin, who thought they had talked long enough about wines — a subject of conversation hardly likely to be interesting to the ladies, asked his neighbor, Madame Fleurinard, if she received a fashion journal from Paris.

"Do I receive a fashion journal, monsieur?" answered this lady, "why, monsieur, I subscribe to three of them now. During my first husband's life I only took one; Alphonse was afraid that I should get too fond of dress; in my second's time I took two; Leonce loved to see me well-dressed, and under my third, Joachim, who allowed me to do as I liked, I subscribed for a third. Oh, I could not exist without my fashion books."

"Then, madame, you would very likely take a fourth if you had a fourth husband."

"Ah, monsieur, who knows," answered the widow bridling, while M. Potard, muttered,—

"Four subscriptions for the widow of three husbands! she's too expensive; she should be contented with the 'Little Journal.'"

Seizing a moment when nothing was to be heard but the sound of the knives and forks, M. Grandbec, who for some time had been trying to recall something agreeable to relate to the company, said in a voice that came from the depths of his chest,—

"They found a man hanging behind Father Lucas' barn yesterday."

"Good Lord!"

"How horrible."

"That will serve us as an appetizer after the soup," said Eugène. "But monsieur would have done better to reserve it till the roman punch."

"Monsieur, I tell you I saw the corpse."

"What, M. Grandbec, do you mean to say that you went to look at a man who had hanged himself," said Madame Boulinot.

"Why not, madame? a hanged man is the same as any other man."

"Yes, if the other be a dead man."

"Well," said M. Belatout, "do they know who this man was? did anybody recognize him?"

"That would be difficult, his features were already decomposed."

"Oh, monsieur, spare us the details, pray."

"However, a woman unexpectedly came up and exclaimed, 'It's Nicaise! it's my husband. Unhappy man, he's killed himself because his feet perspired and I told him I would not buy him any more socks. He used enough to ruin us.'"

"That is a very moving story," said Eugène, "of this gentleman who killed himself because his trotters were odoriferous. It seems to me that the Corton wine should come now to wash that down."

"Yes," said Potard, "I am of Eugène's opinion. Give us some of your Corton, Belatout, we are longing to make its acquaintance."

The Corton wine was brought in by Jacquet, who placed several bottles before his master, saying,—

"Here's something really good this time."

"How do you know that?" inquired Eugène, "you've been tasting of it, then?"

"Yes, monsieur, when I bottled it, the coopers had told me that that was always fit to drink."

"That will do, Jacquet," said M. Belatout, "I shall have an eye on you for the future when you are in the cellar."

"If monsieur wishes to go in my place I shall be only too glad. I'll hold the light for him."

The Corton wine was poured, and Potard, the connoisseur, inhaled the bouquet.

"Yes, that's very fine—that is," said he, "hum! delicious bouquet—let's taste it."

"Well, Potard, what do you say about it?"

"It's perfect! I defy anyone to find better."

Everybody chorused the same. M. Boulinot alone shook his head, saying,—

"Isn't it a little gone off?"

"Gone off! this wine gone off!" cried Belatout, "why, it's in the height of its perfection. Am I not right, Potard?"

"I repeat, it is perfect, and I know what I am saying."

"In finding that it had gone off," said Eugène, "M. Boulinot meant to say that it will be presently. This wine goes as fast as a letter by post; I ask for some more of it immediately, and some for my neighbor also."

"Ah, M. Eugène, spare me. You will make me drink too much."

"M. Eugène, spare my wife," said Plantureau in his turn, "she's very excitable when she's had a little wine."

"So much the better, she'll be able to withstand the shock of your inventions. Now we are going to peck at the trout caught by my friend Marcelin, for you did catch them, didn't you, Marcelin?"

The young fisher, who wished to make himself agreeable to his host, replied,—

"My dear Eugène, let me enjoy this Corton wine; I have never drunk anything so good."

"Then you can never have drunk chambertin," said M. Boulinot.

"Pardon me, I have drunk it, but I prefer this."

"I'll wager," said Eugène, "that M. Boulinot has some excellent chambertin in his cellar now, and that he wishes us to taste of it for the sake of comparison. Jacquet, go to M. Boulinot's and tell his man that you've come from him to get some chambertin."

"Why no, why no," exclaimed Boulinot, restraining Jacquet, who was about to go out, "I told you that my servants had decamped — they are gone out, and besides I'm not sure that I have any chambertin left. I have so many kinds of wine in my cellar."

"Then you may go hang yourself!"

M. Boulinot sat with his mouth open as if petrified at what he had heard; all the ladies opened their eyes in astonishment, and the men could hardly believe their ears. M. Grandbec, who was quite horrified at the slang used by Eugène, muttered to himself,—

"'You may go hang yourself' — 'peck' — 'trotters' — I don't understand at all what he means."

"My son," said M. Belatout, assuming a grave expression, "what means this manner of expressing yourself? You tell M. Boulinot to go hang himself, you address him familiarly as 'old chap,' as if he were one of your college friends."

"Why, my dear father, I did not intend to be familiar with monsieur, I only employed a new mode of expression very much used in society

now, such as 'you can go hang yourself,' or 'you've no sense in your old nob,' or 'go hire a hall,' or 'I engage you for the next waltz.'"

"Enough, Eugène, enough, pray spare us this language of the slums."

"Slum language! not at all, it's greatly in vogue in the very highest society."

"As M. Eugène did not intend to be familiar," said M. Boulinot, "I take no offence."

"Familiar with you? I should be very sorry to be so," said Eugene, laughing. "When you've allowed me to taste all the wines in your cellar that will be different — I'd be willing to give you my portrait then. Come, Father Potard, drink with me, you are the only one here who knows how to drink; 'To the ladies' health!'"

All the men rose immediately to drink to the toast offered by the son of the house. But the latter, who had already taken too much madeira, was doing the same with the Corton, and began to say everything that came into his head, and tried to insist that every one should do the same as he did. In vain his friend Marcelin signed to him to be moderate and not to drink too much. Eugène kept exclaiming,—

"Dad's wine is famous, we must do honor to it. I give you the example, let every one of you follow it, let's laugh! let's sing, let's be jolly, by my pipe! But what's the matter with you, my little lambs, you're as merry as grave-diggers. My fair

"Come, Father Potard, drink with me . . . 'To the ladies' health!'"

PHOTOGRAVURE FROM ORIGINAL DRAWING BY LOUIS MEYNELL.

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neighbor is the only one who knows how to tipple. Happy wife of a husband who one of these days will invent mechanical children who will walk by steam."

"My son, take care!—you are going too far."

"What do you mean by too far? Why with steam one may go to the end of the world. What do you say to that, M. Hanged-man? Let's see if you haven't something else that is nice and comical to tell these ladies; you have such a happy choice of stories. As for that, if you wanted to make your audience tremble, to frighten the fair sex, you could easily be successful, you have everything necessary to do that."

M. Grandbec looked at Eugène as though he were scared, and whispered to Diana,—

"Is your brother always like that, mademoiselle?" To which the young girl replied,—

"I don't know, monsieur."

The dessert came and the champagne made its appearance; then Eugène exclaimed,—

"The author of my being's champagne Rozey! I know it well—I never drank better in Paris. My children, if you can't become a little cheerful as you drink that, I give you up as a bad job—that is the ladies' wine, but the men need not abstain from it either. Pull the corks! pull the corks! Marcelin, pass me that bottle; you'll see how I draw the cork of it."

"But M. Belatout has already opened one."

"Do you imagine we are going to content ourselves with one?—that would be a pretty way to feast my return. Pass me that bottle, you'll see how I'll make the corks fly! Let the music begin!"

In fact, Eugène had uncorked the bottle before his father had cut the wires of his. The foam spurted forth, and as he pretended to be trying to keep it in he sent it into several faces. Madame Boulinot exclaimed,—

"Oh, monsieur, I have some in my eye."

"That will clear the sight, madame."

"My nostrils are full of it," said Plantureau.

"Then you must wipe it off. Another bottle, this one's empty. I bet I'll get the two drunk while my father is pouring one. Jacquet, give me another bottle. Well, neighbor, how do you like it?"

"Oh, it's only too good."

"What do you mean by too good? Can anything be too good?"

"Yes, one may want too much of it."

"Well, drink some more then."

"M. Eugène, I beg of you—my eyes are so hazy now that I can't see my husband."

"You see the ladies are right to like this wine."

M. Belatout at last got the cork out of his bottle, he offered champagne to M. Boulinot, saying,—

"Well, are you going to tell me you have better champagne Rozey than that?"

"I don't know—in the first place, I have none of that color; I don't like Rozey."

"M. Boulinot has none but green," exclaimed Eugène, filling his glass again.

"Me, young man! I have some Moet, some real Moet."

"Well, then, go and get some of it, old chap, that we may judge of it."

"Old chap! What! monsieur, are you calling me old chap now?"

"Does that vex you, by Jove! Why, 'old chap' is only a little term of endearment; but if you'd rather be called old fellow, all right."

"My son, I beg of you, moderate your spirits."

"Why, my dear father, are we here to be jolly or are we not? Well, then, as the hero of the festival I set a good example. Why, if I should say to this gentleman who relates such cheerful anecdotes that his nose was like the beak of a cormorant, you don't suppose that he would be angry, do you?"

"Are you speaking of me, monsieur?" muttered M. Grandbec.

"Of whom else should I be speaking? Not of M. Triffouille, certainly, for he's flat-nosed."

"Monsieur, nature made us as we are."

"That's so, and your sisters also."

"What do you mean by my sisters? I haven't any."

"Ha! ha! are they yet to come. I drink to these ladies!"

"Eugène, you are drinking too much."

"Marcelin, leave me alone; I mean to laugh, I'm very amiable when I'm in wine. I drink again to these ladies!"

"My son, stop; it is quite time you did so."

"I stop! before the champagne's all done? never! Ah, now Madame Boulinot's winking her little eyes, Madame Triffouille has got some color — the Widow Fleurinard holds herself as straight as an obelisk. That's what you may call a ducky darling little widow."

"My son, I call you to order!"

"We are not in the chamber,[1] father. Let's see, beautiful Madame Fleurinard, you have had three husbands; tell us frankly, was there not one of them who was at times a little — you know what?"

"I don't know what you mean, M. Eugène."

"Oh, that's good! you don't know what all husbands become, in general and individually."

"Monsieur, my husbands, were very happy, all three of them!"

"They were all three happy! That was what I meant to ask you."

"My son, you are going beyond all bounds."

"What, I'm going beyond the bounds because I ask this Bluebeard's apprentice whether one of her husbands had not been — like the others?"

"M. Marcelin take him away."

"Eugène, come out and get a little air."

"You be blowed; you bore me to extinction."

[1] Chamber of Deputies.

Marcelin had risen, he put his arm in Eugène's and said to him,—

"Come and have a smoke."

"Yes, we'll go and have a smoke. Don't be impatient, children, we'll soon be back. Little neighbor, will you come and have a smoke with us?"

The gentle Eulalie made a movement as if to rise, but a glance from her husband nailed her to her place, and she sank back in her chair murmuring,—

"Ah, that's right! they are going to smoke. I was thinking they were going to dance."

CHAPTER IV

A Pleasant Evening

"I ask a thousand pardons, ladies and gentlemen," said M. Belatout, when Marcelin had led Eugène away. "I beg you to excuse the unconventionality of my son's behavior to us. I am really very sorry for it. I am aware that it is due to the champagne he has taken, which has upset his judgment a little, and I am not less displeased by his lack of decorum in company; he should not make himself tipsy, but I suppose that is one of the many undesirable things that young men learn in Paris."

"Why, my dear fellow," said Potard; "people get tipsy quite as frequently in the country as they do in the city; your son can't stand much wine, that is all — but there's no great harm in all that, it is a fault that will correct itself later."

"There is no doubt," said Madame Triffouille, "that it is the effect of the champagne — the young man is very good-tempered."

"I think him extremely pleasing," said Madame Plantureau.

"As for me," said the Widow Fleurinard, "I forgive his little pleasantries."

"But why did he call me 'old chap'?" said M. Boulinot.

"And he made use of a very peculiar expression on leaving the room," added M. Grandbec slyly. "Does your brother often utter such phrases, mademoiselle?"

Diana answered him in a dry, slighting tone,—

"He only came this morning, monsieur, and I think everything right that he has said."

They went into the drawing-room to take coffee, and there M. Belatout tried to make everybody forget the incidents of the dinner; but in the country people are so pleased to have something new to talk about that they would afford entertainment at all the little gatherings for a fortnight and each one had already commented on the conduct of the son of the house.

"Fortunately, Mademoiselle de Boissalé was not at dinner," reflected Belatout to himself, as he sipped his coffee. "But she is coming with her aunt this evening. I hope my son will not make his appearance until he is entirely sober."

Then M. Belatout went to M. Grandbec and, slapping him on the shoulder, said,—

"Well, young man, my son's language and bearing must have seemed very blamable to you, who are so prudent, so settled, so reserved in your manners!"

"As a matter of fact, monsieur, I confess I am not accustomed to hear the words your son used.

Not that I am offended at his saying I had a nose resembling a bird's beak; but it was that phrase, 'You be blowed,' which he said as he went out that seemed to me very vulgar."

"That's the effect of the evil acquaintances he has picked up in Paris. But he'll soon lose all that with us here, and I hope he'll take you for his model."

"You have a compensation in your daughter, she is a very pleasing, very witty young lady."

"My daughter! why she didn't speak at all at the table!"

"All the same, she is very pleasing."

Several other persons were coming to spend the evening at M. Belatout's, and in due time Mademoiselle de Boissalé and her aunt entered the room. This young lady was partly humpbacked and frightfully plain; she constantly wore a most disagreeable, sullen expression. The aunt was enormously corpulent, never spoke four consecutive words, and always kept one of her eyes shut, sometimes the right and sometimes the left.

M. Belatout hastened to offer armchairs to these ladies, who said to him immediately,—

"Where is your son; will you not present him to us?"

"He will return to us soon, he felt the need of a little fresh air after dinner, but you'll see him presently."

The other evening guests were quite as curious

to see the son of the house and inquired about him from those who were at dinner. M. Boulinot invariably answered,—

"He's gone out to get over the effects of his wine."

"What! you don't mean that?"

"He was as drunk as a fiddler."

"Is it possible?"

"He called us stunning and said, 'You be blowed' to us."

"Good heavens! where did he learn such talk as that?"

But if they inquired of Madame Plantureau about Eugène she would answer,—

"Oh, he's charming, as pleasant as possible. He said things at table that almost made us die laughing. Some of them say he was tipsy, but that is a calumny. He was just a tiny bit over the mark, that was all. I wish my husband would be like that sometimes."

This will give the reader an idea that the conjectures which people were making upon the young man were very dissimilar, but they made those to whom they were addressed only the more impatient to see the son of the house.

However, the time glided away and he whom they were so anxious to see did not appear. Nine o'clock struck, and in the provinces at a simple evening party nine o'clock was considered rather late. M. Belatout had been several times into the

dining-room, he had called Jacquet and questioned Friquette. The latter had thus answered him,—

"M. Eugène wanted to smoke in here, but M. Marcelin said to him, 'you know well that your father doesn't like the smell of tobacco; we must go and smoke out of doors.'"

"He was right," said M. Belatout, "I do dislike the smell of a pipe or even a cigar; but my son left the table at half-past seven and here it is past nine. He could not need to be an hour and a half out of doors to dissipate the fumes of a little champagne!"

"They perhaps have gone to get something else to drink," suggested Jacquet.

"That would put the finishing touch to his conduct!"

"Jacquet is a great idiot!" cried Friquette. "M. Marcelin is incapable of allowing his friend to do wrong."

"No matter, I must find my son; it is necessary that he should make his appearance in the drawing-room. Mademoiselle de Boissalé is asking after him at every moment. Jacquet, you will go into every café in the town and seek M. Eugène, and when you have found him tell him he must come home with you immediately."

"Yes, monsieur, I will even offer him my arm."

M. Belatout returned to the company, but when they saw him come into the room alone conjecture increased and they whispered to each other,—

"He hasn't brought his son with him — the young man is not presentable, I suppose."

"Can he have gone back to Paris already, without taking leave of his father?"

"He seems to be a very worthless fellow."

"A shockingly bad fellow, who doesn't know in the least how to behave in a drawing-room."

"Every time he opens his mouth he says something that shocks people."

"And he walks as though he were dancing the cancan."

"In that case it's extremely fortunate that he doesn't come back."

The conversation suddenly ceased, for he who was the subject of it entered with M. Marcelin. The appearance of Eugène produced a singular effect on everybody; he was so pale that he was alarming. The reader will understand whence came this pallor on learning that before he rejoined his father he had been into the kitchen to drink a glass of brandy. And there, to render him more interesting in the eyes of the guests, Friquette had conceived the idea of rubbing his face lightly with a little flour dissolved in water. She had not informed the young man, but had merely said to him,—

"It will refresh you to bathe your face a bit."

Eugène allowed her to do so, and his friend Marcelin, who was not looking, had not noticed the effect produced by Friquette's ministrations.

When the Widow Fleurinard saw him she uttered an exclamation of fright and fell back in her chair.

"Ah, here you are at last," exclaimed M. Belatout as his son came in. "That's good, everybody has been inquiring for you. But how pale you are! Are you still feeling unwell?"

"Me! not at all, father," answered Eugène, bowing very gravely to the guests, for his friend Marcelin had told him that at dinner he had been a great deal too hilarious, and he had promised to conduct himself quite differently during the rest of the evening.

"I've never seen you look so ghastly; you must have smoked too much. Has my son been very greatly indisposed, M. Marcelin?"

Marcelin came forward, he looked at Eugène, and perceiving the manner in which Friquette had smeared his friend's face, he bit his lips to keep from laughing, and replied with embarrassment,—

"It is nothing, monsieur; Eugène did, in fact, feel rather unwell, but he seems to be all right now."

"What do you mean? seems to be all right! on the contrary, I think he seems all wrong! he's as pale as death."

Marcelin went up to his friend and whispered to him,—

"Friquette has plastered your face with flour, and you look like a corpse."

"So much the better! she did well," answered Eugène, and he turned towards the company and

made grimaces at everybody, assuming the appearance of trying to smile.

"My son, come and let me present you to Mademoiselle de Boissalé and her aunt."

Eugène allowed himself to be led up to them. Mademoiselle de Boissalé looked at the young man as if she were afraid of him, and the aunt closed both eyes at the same time.

"Mademoiselle, this is my son, who will be very happy to make your acquaintance."

"Oh, so this is your son, monsieur, does he always look so bad as that? he's as pale as a ghost."

"No, mademoiselle," answered Eugène, bowing; "this pallor will pass. It's not as if one were hunchbacked, deformed, those things do not pass; on the contrary, they increase as one grows older."

Mademoiselle de Boissalé cast a furious glance at Eugène. His father nudged his elbow, and whispered to him,—

"What makes you say such stupid things? You had no need to mention hunchbacks before this young lady, who has one of her shoulders slightly deformed — it was extremely ill-bred. I don't believe you are sober yet."

"It's your fault, my dear father; what need was there for you to present me to that monster?"

"That monster! the idea! a young lady who has twenty thousand francs income already — a superb match, that I have arranged for you!"

"For me? Oh, thanks for such a present as

that! — I really can't deprive you of it! Marry her yourself, father, since she pleases you so much! marry her! I shan't be jealous. Ah, here's Diana coming towards us. What do you want, little sister?"

"I want to rub your cheeks to take off that white stuff which some one has put on your face."

"Leave me alone; I feel all right as I am."

"But you frighten everybody!"

"Impossible. Let me see, my little neighbor of the dinner-table, if I frighten you?"

Eugène sat down beside Madame Plantureau, who welcomed him with a sweet smile.

"Never! why should I be afraid of you? But you certainly have got something on your face. Let me see what it is!"

The lady took a corner of her handkerchief and began to rub Eugène's cheek; the white came off, the cheek reappeared in its natural color, and the sympathetic Eulalie exclaimed,—

"Oh, I knew very well it was a joke! now the other cheek!"

M. Plantureau, who saw his wife very busily rubbing young Belatout's face, called to her,—

"Eulalie, what on earth are you doing to M. Eugène?"

"I'm rubbing him, my dear, restoring him to his original color. Somebody has been amusing themselves by smearing his face with white, no doubt it was his friend Marcelin who played this joke on him. See, he looks all right now."

"A pretty joke," said Madame Boulinot, "to get himself up like a corpse to receive his friends."

"It's all the more ridiculous," added the Widow Fleurinard, "as it is not carnival time."

"I think he's still tipsy," said M. Grandbec in a low tone.

Mademoiselle de Boissalé thought the young man infinitely better looking now that his ghastly pallor had disappeared, and she nudged her aunt to open an eye and look at him.

M. Boulinot looked mockingly at Eugène.

"Well," he said, "have they passed?"

"Have what passed?"

"The bacchic fumes."

"Why, I've never been tipsy; if I pretended to be so it was only to make fun of you all."

"Oh, I don't credit that. And this idea of presenting yourself this evening looking like a death's head, makes me think you have not recovered your senses."

"To prove the contrary to you, if you like, I'll join you in a game of écarté, and win your money, too!"

"A game of écarté, why I should like that very well indeed; but you'll get beaten, young man, for I am a player of the first order."

"We'll see about that! I can play a pretty good game, too. Wait, here's a table ready to our hand."

Eugène and fat Boulinot placed themselves at

a table on which were some cards. While shuffling a pack, Eugène drew from his pocket a five-franc piece, which he threw on the cloth; and M. Boulinot, after fumbling for some time in his pockets, got together five sous, which he placed in front of him, saying,—

"Come, we'll play for high stakes. So much the worse, every day is not a festival. You have no small coin, but I'll give you some change."

Eugène looked at the sous spread on the table,—

"How's this? did you put that down there to play with?"

"Five sous. It seems a good deal to you, perhaps, but I like to make the game interesting."

"A good deal? five sous? Why, you must be joking! It's five francs we are going to play for."

"Five francs! what are you thinking of, young man? Five francs at a game; I've never done that before in my life."

"Well, you are going to do it today; once is not making a habit of it."

"Five francs! why, one might as well go into a gaming house — play roulette."

"There's no question of roulette, as we are going to play at écarté; the game is not amusing unless there is something at stake."

"Monsieur, I don't play five francs."

"Oh, that's altogether different, M. Boulinot; if you are afraid of losing, or if your means won't allow you to so, then we won't play."

When one piques another's self-conceit he is certain of gaining his end. So M. Boulinot cried,—

"Monsieur, my means assuredly permit me to play high; if I refused you it was because I did not want to win your money. But since you are determined on it, we'll play for five francs; if you lose, it will be your own fault."

"Oh, don't rely on that, M. Boulinot; I am a very good player indeed, and I don't complain when I lose."

"As to that, we shall see, monsieur."

The game began, M. Boulinot, who never played higher than five sous, trembled when he dealt the cards and played at random. He lost the game.

"Do your wish your revenge?" asked Eugene.

"Yes, monsieur, yes, most certainly I wish to have my revenge."

However, Grandbec, who had seen a few pieces of gold on the table, said to everyone,—

"They are playing écarté like the deuce, the table is covered with gold."

"Impossible!"

"We must go and see that."

"What! my husband is playing with gold?" said Madame Boulinot, running to the card table and nudging her husband.

"M. Boulinot, this must be some joke; you're never playing a hundred sous at a time?"

M. Boulinot, who was on the way to lose his second game, pushed his wife away.

"Leave me alone," said he, "don't come and bother me. You will bring me bad luck. You've caused me to refuse some cards and I've lost again. My revenge, monsieur."

"Oh, as much as you like, monsieur!"

M. Belatout drew near the table where they were playing écarté, and beheld fat Boulinot bathed in perspiration and as red as a lobster, rolling his eyes affrightedly about him and muttering,—

"I've lost! lost again, that makes fifteen francs, it makes more than that! no, that makes fifteen francs."

"What are you saying, Boulinot? that you've lost fifteen francs? I hope you mean fifteen sous, nobody has ever lost fifteen francs in my house!"

"Well, your son has won them from me this evening. He led me on to do so and I had the weakness to consent. I have lost all my money. Monsieur, I will play ten francs this time."

"Just as you like, monsieur, quits or double, if you like."

"Well so be it, quits or double."

"What! my husband has lost fifteen francs at once," cried Madame Boulinot. "Why that is frightful! that's horrible! M. Belatout, snatch the cards out of their hands."

In vain M. Belatout tried to put an end to the game. Boulinot, who hoped to win his money back, got angry when his host tried to prevent them from continuing, and the latter was obliged

to leave the players alone. Everybody pressed around the table to watch this interesting game. Marcelin and Diana were the only ones who did not occupy themselves with the play; but the young man said, sighing,—

"Your brother hasn't managed things well this evening. No matter, I shall speak to your father tomorrow; for I wish to have my fate decided speedily."

Around the card table an imposing silence reigned; they were afraid to speak, to breathe, they were so fearful of losing sight of the game, one would have imagined that the fate of the town hung on this game of écarté. M. Boulinot had three points and his adversary had none as yet. His breath was coming back to him, he looked around him with an almost triumphant expression, and all the ladies went to tell his wife, who had spread herself out on a divan, from whence she dared not look at the players,—

"Your husband has three points."

"Three points — and the other?"

"M. Eugène hasn't one."

"Then my husband has won."

"Not yet; but we shall see later."

However, in the following hand Eugène had the king and took the trick, which equalized the chances. M. Boulinot became savage again, and his mouth grew dry. The game ended and again the son of the host was the victor.

M. Boulinot for a moment seemed stunned, then he rose up and said in a cavernous voice,—

"Come, Madame Boulinot, get your shawl and let us go."

"Yes, my dear."

"What, are you going already," said M. Belatout, "why, it's early yet."

"Already, do you say? Many thanks! I'm very sorry that I didn't go long ago! I've lost thirty francs. This is a party that I shall remember all my life. Thirty francs! What a lesson! Come, madame, I need a little fresh air."

And M. Boulinot dragged rather than led his wife away.

"He's a very bad player," said Eugène, "he lost, but he might have won; and if I'd lost I shouldn't have screwed up my phiz like that."

"I am highly displeased with your conduct, my son," said M. Belatout. "Hereafter, I shall only allow you to play loto."

"Thanks, I prefer cup and ball."

The company was not long in following the Boulinots' example. They left, and each made his or her comment on the evening they had passed at M. Belatout's.

"I'm sure I shan't go there again," said the Widow Fleurinard; "I don't like to see young men get tipsy!"

"And then to come in looking like a corpse," said Mademoiselle de Boissalé, "I can't under-

stand how he could do so. The young man must be infatuated."

"To make any one lose thirty francs at écarté. Fie! a pretty house, that is."

"That means it's a gaming house."

"A gambling hell! I cannot view it in any other light."

CHAPTER V

M. Belatout Makes a Mess of It

Eugène, immediately after the dispersion of the company, hurried to bed to avoid the reprimands which he knew were awaiting him from his father, however, on the following morning he had no way of shielding himself from them, and M. Belatout, whose frowning face announced that he was in a severe mood, ordered his son to follow him to his study and began by saying to him,—

"Eugène, I am highly displeased with you."

"And wherefore are you displeased with me, my dear father?" inquired Eugène, as nonchalantly as possible.

"Have you the effrontery to ask me why? It seems to me that you ought to understand very well why. How did you conduct yourself yesterday in the presence of my company? First of all, you allowed yourself to use most vulgar expressions, one might have imagined your conversation to have been culled from the slang dictionary — before ladies, too. Your manners were abominable, such as I never thought to see in a son of mine."

"That was to make them laugh, to enliven your

guests a little, for they did not look as though they felt very lively."

"Monsieur, people do not amuse themselves in that manner here; nor is it absolutely essential, in good society, that people should be lively. You said, 'You be blowed' to the company?"

"Did you think I said, 'You be blowed'?"

"I'm perfectly sure that you did. M. Grandbec was quite scandalized at it."

"A pretty bird your Grandbec is! He's a gateux."

"What did you say?"

"I say he's a gateux,[1] or, if you like it better, an idiot, an imbecile, one of those beings who are good for nothing but to bore others."

"My son, you must respect a young man who is a model of virtue and who will be your brother-in-law."

"My brother-in-law! you are never thinking to marry my nice little sister to that cormorant? You must be joking."

"No, monsieur, I am not joking. But let us return to yourself. What do you mean by, 'You be blowed'?"

"It means, 'oh, you go hang,' or, 'you bore me,' or rather, 'you make me feel stupid.'"

"So you told my guests that they made you feel stupid. That is polite. That's pretty language for a well-bred young man!"

[1] An ultra idiotic person, one in whom the light of reason and the instincts of human nature are almost extinct.

"Father, that escaped from me when I was not quite myself — that doesn't indicate that I say it always."

"I should hope not, indeed! And then at dinner you got completely tipsy."

"It was in doing honor to your wine, which is really excellent."

"Of course it is excellent, but that is no reason why you should drink too much of it. We'll pass over that. Then you went out to smoke, you two were absent for two hours, and when you returned to my party you had your face covered with white, no doubt to frighten the ladies; why, Madame Fleurinard was almost made ill by it."

"That was Friquette's fault, she put flour in the water with which I was going to wash my face."

"That may be. But you provoked Boulinot to play écarté and urged him to stake a hundred sous in my house; it never happened before. What a reputation you'll give us. They'll say, 'We can't go to M. Belatout's, it's a gambling house. One loses thirty francs there in an evening.' You'll end by bringing the police on us."

"Good heavens, father, I didn't know that you played for such low stakes as that. And as for that I provoked Boulinot to play because it seemed to me he was a sort of wet blanket, a spoil-sport, who wanted to make people uncomfortable, who found nothing good belonging to any one else, and who at bottom was a miserly old screw."

"I certainly was not at all sorry that Boulinot lost thirty francs, he can well afford it; but I am vexed that anyone should have played so high in my house. Now that I have reproached you for everything that I found amiss in your conduct yesterday, I wish to forget and forgive it, but upon the condition that hereafter you are steadier, more settled, that you cease your youthful follies and marry; that is the surest way to win a man from a life of pleasure."

"Oh, you want me to marry?"

"Yes, and I have found a match for you."

"Really. It isn't the Widow Fleurinard, I hope?"

"No, no, be easy, be easy, it's not the widow; it is a young lady, a real young lady!"

"Very pleasing?—very well built?"

"There's no question of beauty. What is beauty? It is fleeting and finally disappears."

"Yes, in twenty years more or less."

"But money, my boy, landed property, that doesn't disappear with time. That augments, gives one more and more."

"And a pretty woman gives one progeny. Well, who is my intended?"

"You saw her yesterday at my party."

"Yesterday? I didn't see any young ladies. The little Triffouilles were there, it is true, but they are children."

"The one whom I have destined for you was

there and you spoke to her yesterday. You can't have forgotten her? Mademoiselle de Boissalé?"

"Mademoiselle de Boissalé! What! that horrible travesty of girlhood, with sea-green eyes and skin the color of gingerbread? Come, you are laughing."

"Not at all, on the contrary, I speak in all seriousness. Mademoiselle de Boissalé has twenty thousand francs' income — and a very pretty income it is."

"It doesn't lessen her hump!"

"One need not be in love with one's wife."

"So much the worse, for love makes happier households."

"I've sounded Mademoiselle de Boissalé's aunt on the subject, and she approves."

"Sound the aunt as much as you like, but I decline to have anything to do with the niece. Now, father, look at me. I am not handsome — although I am your son, you must confess I am far from being an Adonis. That's not your fault and I don't blame you for it, but you want me to marry a woman who is uglier than myself and deformed into the bargain. Imagine the result, our children will be such ugly little monsters that we shall be obliged to hide them with masks when they are six months old."

"My son, what you say is very silly; extremely ugly parents often have fine children, that is a freak of nature for which we cannot account. I

repeat that I have settled that you shall marry Mademoiselle de Boissalé and you will obey me."

"I am extremely sorry to appear disobliging, but I shall never marry the hunchback I saw yesterday."

"I say you shall marry her."

"They don't marry people by force; I won't marry her."

"Then I will have nothing further to do with you, I'll cut you out of my will, I won't give you a sou. I'll do nothing more for you. Yes, I'll send you out of my house."

"That will be much better than marrying the Boissalé."

"I'll give you twenty-four hours in which to reflect."

"Thanks, I don't need so much time as that."

"Tomorrow I shall hope to find you more reasonable."

"Tomorrow you won't find me at all," said Eugène to himself, as he quitted his father's study.

M. Belatout remained alone, congratulating himself that he had shown very exemplary firmness, and said to himself,—

"My son will think better of it in the end, he will understand that twenty thousand francs income will smooth even a hunchback. Mademoiselle de Boissalé is not beautiful, that's true, but one needn't look at his wife often. There are some days even when he need not see her at all. When a man is rich he goes hunting — a-hunting

all sorts of things, and he doesn't take his wife with him."

M. Belatout had not remained long in his solitary leisure when Jacquet came to tell him that M. Marcelin Nigelle asked to speak with him.

"Has he brought some more trout?"

"No, he's only got his walking-stick."

"Ask him to come in."

"Yes, monsieur — oh, by the way, monsieur, I went into all the cafés yesterday evening and I didn't find M. Eugène."

"Idiot! don't you know that my son has come back?"

"Yes, but you don't know yet where he was yesterday evening — he was with Friquette in a corner of the kitchen."

"Hold your tongue and tell M. Marcelin to come in."

"Friquette was laughing as hard as she could and throwing water in his face."

"Do you mean to do what I've told you?"

"Yes, master. But all the same Friquette was lacking in respect to him."

Marcelin went into the study, where Belatout, who was seated at his desk, received his visitor with portentous gravity; however, he waved him to a chair, and said to him,—

"You have something to ask of me, Marcelin. Pray take a seat and I will hear what you have to say. I have just been giving my son a lecture

on his conduct of yesterday evening. To be so unconventional in society — this comes of sending young men to Paris; very pretty fellows it makes of them."

"Monsieur, Eugène is very heedless; he likes to laugh, but at bottom he is an excellent fellow! his faults are those common to his youth — boys will be boys."

"Let me tell you, monsieur, that I also have been young and I have never been wild. I never was bent on pleasure; it is true that I married very young. But let us hear what you came to say."

"It is something of great importance, monsieur, and on your answer depends all the happiness of my whole future life."

"Really?"

"Monsieur, I love, I adore, I idolize your daughter, Mademoiselle Diana; I have over eight thousand francs income, I have taken my degree as a doctor, and I come to ask you for her hand."

"I am very sorry, monsieur, to blight your hopes, but my daughter cannot be your wife because I have destined her for another — it is almost a settled thing."

"O monsieur, pray rescind that resolution. Your daughter will never love M. Grandbec, whom you have chosen for her."

"Oh, so you know it's Grandbec whom I have chosen? Well, yes, monsieur, it is he, and why should Diana not love him? Grandbec is young,

he's by no means bad-looking; it is true that he hasn't the tone of the young men of Paris, and that is precisely why he suits me."

"But, monsieur, what if another — myself, for instance, were fortunate enough to win Mademoiselle Diana's favor?"

"That is impossible, my daughter is too well-bred to allow herself to even think for a moment of preferring any one. Besides, at her age a girl accepts the husband that her father gives her — and takes him with her eyes shut."

"She would have to shut them to accept your M. Grandbec."

"You have a grudge against that good fellow. But listen to me, M. Marcelin; even though I had not destined my daughter to marry M. Grandbec, I should nevertheless refuse to allow you to become my son-in-law."

"Good God! monsieur, what makes you say that, and what have I done that you should treat me so?"

"It is what you have done, which was all that you should not have done! In Paris you were always with my son, you participated in all his pleasures, you shared his follies. What am I saying? you led him on to commit them. I am very well-informed as to that."

"Oh, no, monsieur."

"You love cards, wine and women."

"As everybody else loves them."

"Why, no, monsieur, not like everybody else. I myself have never been guilty of those faults."

"By Jove, monsieur, you would, perhaps, had you lived in Paris instead of at Bar-le-Duc."

"No, monsieur, I am a second Saint Anthony, I would defy any temptation."

"Besides, if I committed the follies usual to youth am I not now wiser, more settled?"

"Yes, yes, you may be proud of that. But there is something worse than all else, you have fought a duel."

"Well, monsieur, that isn't a crime."

"Not a crime! it's really much worse than a crime to go in cold blood to fight, with somebody that one hardly knows sometimes, to risk killing or being killed — it's despicable."

"But, monsieur, there are some cases where it is impossible to avoid a duel."

"Nothing of the kind."

"How if one is insulted?"

"One should despise an insult — not notice it."

"Provoked?"

"One need not listen."

"Struck?"

"Summon a corporal and four men and have the one who struck arrested."

"Oh, no, monsieur, well-bred people do not conduct themselves so."

"I repeat to you, M. Marcelin, that I have a horror of duels and duellists."

"But I am not a duellist."

"Yes, you are, since you have fought a duel. But bear this well in mind: no man who has fought a duel shall ever enter my family — never! never! That is a resolution to which I shall adhere most strictly. Now you have my answer and I believe it is needless for us to continue this conversation. I must also tell you that it will be preferable that you should cease your visits to my house. You imagine that my daughter loves you, which I don't in the least believe, but all the same I shall cut short your intercourse. Good-day, M. Marcelin, when Diana is married you may if you like bring me some trout, I shall then be pleased to see you."

Marcelin left M. Belatout with a heavy heart and a mind oppressed. In the vestibule he found Friquette, who was awaiting the result of this interview, that she might go and impart it to her young mistress, who was very impatient to learn her father's decision. As soon as she saw the unfortunate lover Friquette divined that he had been unsuccessful in his suit.

"Oh, Friquette, my girl, I am in despair," said Marcelin. "M. Belatout refused his daughter to me — he wants her to marry that frightful Grandbec! He doesn't leave me the slightest hope, for even if he doesn't give her to Grandbec he refuses her to me, and all because I have fought a duel."

"Poor young man! and poor mamzelle, for she will be distracted with grief."

"And that is not all. Because I told him that I was not displeasing to his daughter, M. Belatout has forbidden me to come here again until after she is married."

"How foolish! As if you would want to come after that."

"Well, Friquette, there is nothing left for me but to die. I have a good mind to go and join the trout."

"For goodness' sake don't do anything like that! The idea of killing yourself as if there was no hope! why as long as you are alive, there's still some of that. I tell you you shall marry Mamzelle Diana. I've taken it into my head that you shall, and I am as obstinate as the best of them."

"How can you change your master's will?"

"His will! Why, I've made him change it a good many times already without his suspecting it. But I was forgetting to tell you that your friend Eugène is waiting for you at the café at the corner."

"Must I leave without seeing Diana? Ah, when shall I see her now that her father's door is closed against me."

"Pshaw! the door may be closed, but there are plenty of windows; and then, haven't we our cornet to play when we are alone?"

"Oh, Friquette, you restore a little of my hope."

"Have as much as you can and don't grieve, go and seek M. Eugène and I'll try to console mamzelle a little."

"Tell her that I still love her — love her more than ever; that I shall never love any other; that—"

"All right! all right! I know all you are going to say; with lovers it's always the same thing. Go quickly, M. Belatout mustn't see you here now. He must still think that he is promptly obeyed."

Marcelin hurried to join his friend Eugène, to whom he imparted the result of his interview with M. Belatout.

"I am not surprised at his refusal," said Eugène, "my father declines to introduce anybody but freaks into our family."

"He refused me unconditionally because I had fought a duel. Oh, what a good idea! I'll go in search of Grandbec, I'll insult him, I'll provoke him, I'll oblige him to fight, and your father, who won't take as a son-in-law a man who has fought a duel, will not want to give his daughter to him."

"An undesirable proceeding, my friend, and hopelessly impracticable because this Grandbec wouldn't fight, you may be sure of that."

"What is to be done then?"

"Await a more favorable moment. As for me, my father has told me that he will close his house to me; I shall take advantage of the opportunity to return to Paris."

"What, do you mean to say you wish to leave here?"

"Yes, and today; come with me."

"Oh, no, Eugène, I don't wish to go far from your sister."

"Well, you'll write to me, old fellow? I'll send you my address, for I don't know where I shall put up."

"What, are you going today?"

"Yes, my dear fellow, I've told Jacquet to pack my valise and bring it to me here. And here's what I shall do: I shall send a little good-by message to my father, I have my note for a thousand francs which I've hardly broken here, I have the thirty francs I won from that fatty Boulinot. Oh, joy, how delightful! I shall see Zozinette, who smokes through the nose, and my friend Spiterman. You don't know my friend Spiterman, do you, Marcelin?"

"No, who and what is he?"

"Oh, he's a German baron — a very original fellow who came to Paris to find a faithful woman who would love him for himself alone."

"Quite a German idea."

"As he is rich and always disposed to offer presents to the ladies, and dinners and carriages and pleasure parties, he has nothing to do but take his choice — as a mere matter of course all the ladies adore him for himself."

"And what do you do with this baron?"

"When any one is taking too many rises out of him I enlighten him, for he's really a very good fellow! and then he's always dining and wining one,

he's a very agreeable acquaintance. Jacquet, take that valise and carry it with me to the railway station."

"Do you want me to carry you with the valise, monsieur?"

"What a simpleton you are! take the valise and follow me. Good-by, Marcelin. I'll write to you, you will write to me, we will write to each other!"

"Are you starting without kissing your sister?"

"My father has put me out; I shall kiss you and that will be the same thing. Good-by till I see you again. If you get too much bored here, come and look me p in Paris and I'll make you acquainted with Spiterman."

Eugène embraced Marcelin and departed, followed by Jacquet, who said to himself,—

"What, our young master only came yesterday and here he's going back today! he can't stay quiet for a moment."

CHAPTER VI

Friquette Begins to Act

Monsieur Belatout in a moment of anger had indeed said to his son that he should close his house to the latter if he did not consent to marry Mademoiselle de Boissalé, but in his heart he really had no intention of sending Eugène away from him, and when dinner-time came and he did not see his son he sent for Friquette, and said to that demure little maid,—

"Inform my son that it is time to come down, that dinner is ready and we are sitting down to the table. And why is not my daughter here? must I send to look for her also?"

Friquette made a little face, half sad and half fearful, as she answered,—

"Mamzelle Diana is not coming down, she doesn't wish for any dinner."

"And why is that? is she ill?" inquired the puzzled Belatout.

"I don't know if she is ill, monsieur," said Friquette, "but I do know she has cried till her eyes are all swelled up."

"She's crying? Diana is? and what is she crying for?"

"Goodness, monsieur, I suppose it is because she is troubled about something."

"Troubled? troubled about what?"

"I don't know, master; only when M. Marcelin went away a short time ago after talking with you he met Mamzelle Diana downstairs and said to her 'Good-by, mamzelle, I shall never see you again, never! never!' and mamzelle said to him, 'But why, why?' and he answered —"

"That will do, Friquette, I can imagine all that M. Marcelin would say to her, and if it should afflict my daughter a little, it won't endanger her life. It's only a little girl's fancy, in a few days she'll have forgotten it. Go and tell my son dinner is ready."

Just as Friquette was preparing to obey her master, Jacquet came into the dining-room holding in his hand a letter from Eugène which he handed to M. Belatout, saying to him,—

"Now's the time! you are going to sit down to dinner, I can give you the letter."

"Where did you get that letter, you imbecile?"

"From your son, master."

"Did he give it to you just now?"

"No, he gave it me more than two hours ago."

"What, you rascal! why did you not bring it to me immediately?"

"Oh, no, M. Eugène had forbidden me; he said to me, 'You won't give this note to my father until just as he is sitting down to dinner!'"

"What does all this mean?"

M. Belatout hurriedly tore open the letter from his son, which contained these words,—

Good-by, dear father, you have shut me out of your house because I would not marry a hunchback. I will come back to it when Mademoiselle de Boissalé is prepared to pose as Hebe. While awaiting that event I am returning to Paris.

Your very affectionate son,
EUGÈNE BELATOUT.

M. Belatout crushed the letter angrily in his hand, then threw it on the ground, exclaiming,—

"Ah, monsieur my son, so that's the way you listen to your father! So he has gone — returned to Paris; well, then, he must stay there in his Paris, for he won't come back here again. So much the better for me, for I get rid of a very troublesome fellow."

Sitting down to the table M. Belatout exclaimed, "Come and wait on me, somebody," in the same tone in which he would have said, "Take me out and hang me."

Friquette hurried to bring the soup, of which her master ate a few spoonfuls, then he paused, muttering,—

"Dining alone, when I ought to have my son and my daughter on either side of me."

"If monsieur is lonely," cried Jacquet, "I should like nothing better than to dine with him!"

M. Belatout glanced angrily at his servant, then he said,—

"Where was my son when he gave you that letter?"

"At the café in the square."

"And what were you doing there?"

"I went to take M. Eugène his valise which he had told me to pack for him."

"Why did you pack his valise without telling me?"

"Jingo! M. Eugène said to me, 'My father has turned me out; pack my valise quickly, stuff everything belonging to me into it.' I obeyed him, I didn't think that you would want to keep your son's clothes."

"Be off — you are an ass!"

Jacquet went out muttering, "An ass, am I? Let him try to get on my back, that's all; I'll throw him to the ground."

Friquette continued to wait on her master, saying to him in a little wheedling voice,—

"Monsieur isn't eating anything. You're not hungry, are you, monsieur?"

"No, I am not hungry! Mademoiselle Diana has made up her mind not to come down then?"

"If you like, monsieur, I'll go and tell her that you wish her to come down."

"For me to hear nothing but snivelling and sighing. It's not worth while; I will dispense with her company. Why, what's this I hear, it's not the cornet, surely? Yes, it's my daughter playing her favorite tune, 'Il faut quitter Marie.' It seems she's

not so disconsolate as you wanted me to understand she was."

Friquette could not understand why her young mistress played the cornet at this moment, and hastily answered,—

"It is to distract herself that mademoiselle is playing her instrument — and to please you also, monsieur?"

"Oh, so you think it is to please me that she's playing the cornet now instead of coming down to dinner?"

M. Belatout, who began to have suspicions, ran to the window which looked on the street, opened it and saw Marcelin planted in front of his house with his eyes fixed on the windows of Diana's room, holding his hand to his heart. When he saw his beloved's father appear at a window on the groundfloor, the lover fled and the cornet grew silent.

"Yes, my daughter was playing her cornet for me," said M. Belatout, "and it brought M. Marcelin under her window. Come, I see through this very easily and instead of marrying Diana to Grandbec in six months I'll see that she's married to him inside of six weeks. Friquette, go and warn your mistress that I don't wish to hear her cornet again."

Friquette went up to the young girl's room,—

"Good heavens, mamzelle, what gave you the idea of playing the cornet while your papa was in

the house? It seemed strange to him, for I had just told him that you would not come down to dinner because you were ill, he immediately went to the window to look out and he saw M. Marcelin, who was ogling and telegraphing to you."

"Friquette, I am so lonely and sad! M. Marcelin went out this morning without my seeing him, and I wanted to see him for a little while this evening."

"But you must wait."

"Wait for what? isn't it arranged that my father should go out this evening? I thought he would be all taken up with his dinner, I thought he would pay no attention to the cornet."

"How imprudent you have grown! You who are ordinarily so timid."

"They leave me all alone — even my brother doesn't come to see me."

"Your brother! you'll have a fine a time of it waiting for him! M. Eugène has gone to Paris."

"Gone! my brother has gone! without saying good-by to me? without kissing me? Oh, that is unkind of him."

"True, he might at least have kissed you before going to Paris. But M. Belatout told him he would turn him out because he would not consent to marry Mademoiselle de Boissalé; and as M. Eugène did not wish to marry a hunchback, he left immediately."

"And if I'm not willing to marry that frightful

cormorant of a Grandbec, my father will send me away too."

"Oh, they don't send young girls away as they do young fellows."

"Why did he fall in love with me, this ugly M. Grandbec? I hardly answer him when he speaks to me."

"Hum! I don't know that he's so very much in love with you. Why, when I carried him in something to drink yesterday evening I know that he looked at me — in a very peculiar fashion!"

"In what way did he look at you?"

"Heavens, I don't know how to explain it to you, but he looked at me as if — "

"As if what?"

"As if he wanted to say some foolish things to me."

"Foolish things! why he said nothing else during the whole dinner time."

"Oh, but not stupid things of that sort — things to laugh at — cajoleries."

"Nonsense, do you suppose M. Grandbec wishes to cajole you?"

"Look you, mademoiselle, these men who always look slyly from under their eyelids when they look straight at you, it repulses you; one would believe that they wanted to gobble one up."

"Let him only look straight at me and I shall make the most horrible grimaces at him. My brother has gone, M. Marcelin is not allowed to

come here, my father won't let me play the cornet. Oh, Friquette, I am very unhappy!"

Diana began to sob again, although her little maid did her best to console her.

"Don't give way like that, mamzelle," said Friquette, "we'll find a way to change all this."

The next day M. Belatout, who had not reproached his daughter, merely speaking to her more coldly than usual, received during the day a visit from his friend Plantureau.

"I came to say good-by to you, my dear fellow," said the inventor, "and to ask if you had any commission to give me for Paris."

"What do you mean? are you going to Paris?"

"I start tomorrow morning."

"But only for a short time? you'll be back soon?"

"That isn't at all certain; nobody knows when I shall get back. I am going there this time for something very important, a big thing — and by Jove, these big things don't come off so quickly as one would wish."

"Something else that you've invented?"

"I believe you! this time my success is assured. My invention will prevent accidents on the railroad."

"Ah, that will be a very good thing; if you have found a sure way of guarding travellers from all dangers, you will merit a handsome recompense."

"Yes, I certainly shall merit it. Imagine what

I have discovered, but no, you might speak of it — noise abroad my secret."

"Don't tell me anything about it, it will be much better."

"Yes, but I wish to surprise you with the simplicity and the efficacy of my device."

"No, no, I'll be astonished later on; but I would rather know nothing in advance."

"But I want you to know it."

"If you tell your secret to everybody it'll be stolen from you."

"You are not everybody, are you?"

"All the same, I don't wish you to confide in me."

"Listen closely to what I am going to tell you. What causes accidents on the railroad? It is the meeting of two trains going in opposite directions. These meetings produce shocks of more or less gravity; but if there were no collisions there would be no accidents — isn't that so?"

"Of course — well, what then?"

"It's a question of preventing these collisions; which up to the present no one has been able to do. They occur because the train cannot be stopped as quickly as is necessary — it is only a question, then, of finding a means of stopping a train 'subito' — do you take me?"

"You've only told me up to the present what everybody knows; I'm waiting to hear about your invention."

"Well, my dear fellow, it consists of grapnels, enormous iron grapnels. Wait a bit, just imagine the anchors of vessels, but immense, colossal. The engineers will be provided with them, and when they see a train coming that is about to run into them they immediately throw their grappling irons to the right and left of the road, and by means of them the train is stopped. Well, what do you think of it? Isn't it a luminous idea?"

M. Belatout shook his head as he answered,—

"Perhaps! I can't say as to that. But if the iron grapnels are immense, do you think it will be very easy to throw them out on to the road?"

"That is a mere detail — that's a matter of habit. Besides, they could put several. Oh, my expedient is admirable, and I don't doubt that the minister and the railroad managers will adopt it."

"I hope so, but they'll want to try them first."

"That's why I am going to Paris; I am going to have grapnels made of all sizes."

"And how about your wife?"

"Oh, my wife, I must take her with me. My stay at Paris may be prolonged, and as I don't like to dine at a restaurant she will see to the cooking — it won't be very entertaining to me to take her, but I must."

"Well, if you are to be there for some time, find out what my son is doing and send me word."

"That's understood. I am going to have grapnels fifteen feet in diameter made!"

"He lives, I think, in a hotel on the Rue Richelieu, near the Palais-Royal."

"Do you think I could get grapnels at the Palais-Royal?"

"I was talking about my son."

"Oh, very well. They told me to go for that sort of thing to the Rue du Dragon."

"And if you learn anything disquieting about Eugène write to me immediately."

"Of course. And if they want to charge me too much in the Rue du Dragon, I shall apply to a foundry. Good-by, I must go and finish my preparations for departure. Above all, Belatout, not a word about my grapnels."

"You may be quite easy about that."

"If you shall be so unfortunate as to let a word slip about my secret I will never forgive you. Good-by!"

"The devil take him and his grapnels!" said Belatout to himself when the man of inventions had gone. "If I rely on him to send me any word of my son I shall never know what Eugène is doing in Paris."

A week rolled by, Diana did not play on the cornet; but Marcelin prowled during the best part of every day in the vicinity of M. Belatout's house, and when the latter had gone out Friquette would appear at a window on the first floor. Then the lover would venture to draw near; Diana would go to a casement on the groundfloor, where she

could talk for some time with the man of her heart. Friquette was on the watch and coughed loudly if she saw anyone coming. One might as well try to find the philosopher's stone as try to prevent a woman from holding sweet converse where her heart is engaged. M. Belatout did not scold his daughter, but he was constantly in a bad temper. From time to time he said to Friquette,—

"I doubt if that idiot Plantureau gives a single thought to what I asked of him when he's in Paris."

"Did you give him a commission, monsieur?"

"I asked him to let me know something of what my son was doing."

Friquette smiled mischievously and answered,—

"If monsieur counts on others to know how M. Eugène conducts himself, he may be certain that he'll learn nothing."

"Ah, is that your opinion, Friquette?"

"Yes, monsieur, because I have always noticed that people are better able to judge through their own eyes than through those of others — above all things those of their friends, who are not always disposed to put themselves out for us."

"You are right; in general one should attend to his affairs himself — when it is possible. But from here it is hardly possible for me to watch him, to inform myself — to be fully instructed, in short, as to what that heedless fellow Eugène is doing in Paris."

"Oh, it is quite certain that if you want to know

what M. Eugene is doing you mustn't stay fifty leagues away from him. But if monsieur likes, what is to prevent his going himself to Paris to watch over his son?"

"Wait a bit! Why, that's quite an idea. To watch my son's conduct myself. Yes, in that way no one could deceive me. But to leave my usual place of residence — my daily occupations?"

"Sometimes, monsieur, you have said that you were bored because you no longer had any occupation. Such a visit would amuse and interest you, and then you need not stay long."

"But my daughter?"

"Oh, you may be quite easy as to mamzelle, she won't stir from here!"

"Yes, and her admirer Marcelin will pass the day planted in front of her windows. No, no; if I go to Paris I shall take my daughter with me."

"Oh, monsieur, you'll take me too, won't you?"

"It will be necessary for you to come, Diana cannot go without some one to wait on her."

"Oh, you will do so well by going to Paris, master. It is the only way for you to be sure what foolish things your son is doing."

"But if Eugène learns that I am in Paris he'll suspect something, and that will put him on his guard."

"Do you mean to say you would tell him? Besides, haven't you the right, when once you are in Paris, to give yourself another name?"

"No sooner said than done, yes, that will be a clever move — I shall take the first name that comes."

"They call that travelling incognito, don't they, master?"

"Incognito; it is a fashion invented by great personages."

"Monsieur is quite rich enough to do like a great personage."

"This little Friquette has very bright ideas at times."

"You are very kind to say so, monsieur. It is you who have them, not me. Master, must I pack up our things?"

"Oh, not yet. I must think about it, reflect upon it; meanwhile don't breathe a word about it to any one."

"You may be easy, monsieur, I know how to keep a still tongue in my head."

Friquette's first care was to go in search of her young mistress and say to her,—

"Good news, mamzelle, good news. Your father is going to Paris, and he's going to take us both with him."

"And do you call that good news? I shan't be able to see Marcelin at all then."

"Oh, mamzelle, how simple you are! Can't M. Marcelin go to Paris also?"

"But they say that city is so big! How will he be able to find us there?"

"That won't be difficult; I shall send him our address immediately."

"But if my father sees him there he will be very angry."

"Don't be afraid. Paris isn't a little town where every one knows what you do. Trust to me; I've a few ideas in my head. Something tells me that it's in Paris that I shall get you married to the one you love, provided that beast of a Grandbec doesn't spoil the ideas I've put into monsieur's head."

But, so far from doing that, in the evening when M. Grandbec came to see M. Belatout, he informed his host that he expected to have to go constantly to Paris to follow a litigation of which the notary with whom he was studying had charge.

"Well, if you go to Paris you must look me up there," said M. Belatout, "for tomorrow I am going there with my daughter."

"Ah, you're going to show Paris to Mademoiselle Diana?"

"I'm not going for that, but that I may know, see with my own eyes, what my rascal of a son is doing there; and I am taking my daughter because I wish always to have her near me."

"That's very wise, very prudent of you. Then I shall have the pleasure of meeting you in Paris?"

"I count upon seeing you; you can help me to watch my son."

"I will do anything that's agreeable to you."

And M. Grandbec took his leave, squeezing M. Belatout's hand and bowing respectfully to his daughter, and in the vestibule making eyes at Friquette, who put out her tongue as she curtseyed to him.

CHAPTER VII

The Guests at the Hotel

As a result of the little maid's manœuvres, M. Belatout and his daughter Diana, accompanied by Friquette and Jacquet, left Bar-le-Duc for Paris. Old Marianne remained alone to care for the house during their absence.

Diana did not feel entirely sure whether she ought to be pleased at going to Paris, although her little maid kept repeating to her that the visit could not but change her father's resolutions in regard to her marriage with M. Grandbec. The young girl, as was natural, could think of but one thing, and that was the fact that she was going far from her lover.

Friquette was delighted, in the first place because she was going to see Paris, and also because she had a thousand projects in her head the execution of which would have been impossible had they remained at Bar-le-Duc. Jacquet did not know whether to be glad or sorry that he was going to the capital; they had said so much about Paris being such an immense city that he had but one fear, that of losing himself there. So he said to Friquette,—

"When we get to Paris we must keep together and never go out one without the other."

"Yes, that will be so delightfully amusing!"

M. Belatout had ordered the cabman to drive him to a hotel on the Rue Richelieu, which was nearer the boulevards than the Palais-Royal, for he did not wish to risk meeting his son every time he went out. And at the hotel he made them write his name down as M. Montabord.

When Jacquet heard his master give this name at the hotel, he said to Friquette,—

"Why, master's made a mistake. Has he forgotten his own name? That isn't the one he's called by."

Friquette trod on his toe as a signal for him to be silent.

"Hold your tongue, you stupid," she whispered, "can't master change his name in Paris if he wants to?"

"Change his name! that's suspicious, that is. Monsieur should have told me, at least."

"And why, if you please?"

"Because I'm quite willing to serve M. Belatout, but I don't know this M. Montabord he's talking about."

"But since it is the same person?"

"Let me be, you think I'm stupider than I am."

They installed M. Belatout in a very comfortable apartment. Diana had a room with a smaller one adjoining, that Friquette might always be near

her mistress; but Jacquet had a room in the attic because his master did not care to have him incessantly near him. The head of the establishment later showed his new guest to a handsome drawing-room on the first floor, which was common to all comers and where all the guests could meet to chat, before or after dinner, and he did not fail to boast of the high standing of his hotel, where, he asserted, none but people of the best class and highest fashion put up, those with whom a stranger could not but be flattered to make acquaintance.

M. Belatout thanked his host for the information he had given him; he left his daughter to settle herself in her apartment, and after changing his clothes went to the drawing-room.

M. Belatout's aim was to make the acquaintance of people who had Paris at their fingers' ends and could point out to him the places of pleasure frequented by young men who thought of nothing but amusing themselves. In this way he would know where to find his son when he judged it fitting to show himself to the latter.

The drawing-room was at that moment occupied by a single person only; this was a lady who had passed her fortieth year, but who had resolved never to be more than thirty-two years old. By this one may understand the solicitude with which she cared for her face and her toilet in order that time might not leave his mark on her person.

Cosmetics, Jouvence water, essences, perfumes of the sweetest kind were employed by Madame de Vanilley, that being this lady's name — who had never been pretty, but who had a small foot, a well-shaped leg and a beautiful arm, and these gave her many admirers.

Belatout, who had never left his province — except once for three days, twenty-five years previous to the opening of this story — allowed it to be patent to any one gifted with the most ordinary clearness of vision that he was altogether off his own ground in Paris. His coats, though made of the best of cloth, were not cut like those worn in the capital, he had straps on his trousers and they were not worn. He had a white muslin cravat with embroidered ends, which was tied in a knot with the ends falling over the waistcoat. But in the centre of this rosette he had stuck a magnificent diamond pin, the brilliancy of which must necessarily cause the ridiculous rosette to be pardoned him.

When our traveller came into the drawing-room, Madame de Vanilley was seated or rather reclining on a sofa in a pose that was calculated to show off her tiny foot and her pretty arm, in one hand she held a fan and in the other a book of drawings. Belatout, who at first perceived no one, advanced into the room, but suddenly stopped on seeing the little foot swinging gently at the end of the sofa. He turned and seeing this lady who was

fanning herself, he bowed low and began to walk about the room. While so doing he tried to think of something he might say to open a conversation with this lady; nothing came to him and he continued to walk up and down the drawing-room and bow anew to the lady each time he passed her. He had saluted her for the third time, and the lady had begun to think that he looked like one of the bears in the Jardin des Plantes, when a new personage came into the drawing-room.

This was a man of some fifty years of age with a very red face and big gray mustaches; he was of middle height, but he had very fat arms and legs, an expansive rotundity of front, and hands big enough to conceal a melon. This gentleman wore a dirty collar, a closely buttoned overcoat and his gray hair cut like a brush. He affected the bearing of an old soldier and everybody called him major, although nobody ever knew in what regiment he had held rank. He spoke very curtly in a deep voice and made the floor creak under his footsteps.

The newcomer entered the drawing-room unceremoniously, passed in front of Belatout as though he did not see him, and nodding indifferently to the lady of the little foot, said to her familiarly,—

"Good morning, baroness."

"Oh, here you are, major? where have you been hiding yourself?"

"I haven't been hiding — I've been breakfasting at the Palais-Royal."

"With M. de Cracoville?"

"No, with a pâté-de-foie-gras."

"How droll you are! One would not prevent the other."

"Yes, but the other wasn't there."

"And you breakfasted alone, like a wolf?"

"The wolves are not half stupid to go off alone to enjoy their choice morsels. You know that to dine off a turkey poult stuffed with truffles there should be only two there — the diner and the bird."

"Oh, fie for shame, it's dreadful to be such a gourmand as that."

"By that you mean to say you wouldn't do the like — thanks! but I've seen you at work. At the last ball given by your friend, Madame Ethelwina, you never left the buffet."

"That is because I am dainty, I like ices, marrons glacés and jellies, and besides, Ethelwina, with whom I am very intimate, had begged me to watch at the buffet to see that they did not commit too many depredations."

"Then you faithfully fulfilled your commission; for you played sentinel at the buffet."

"Her ball was superb."

"Yes, but for myself I prefer a formal supper to refreshments from a buffet. At least one should be able to sit down, that he may eat and drink at his ease."

During this conversation Belatout remained standing, not knowing whether he should appear to hear what was said, but smiling every time the major looked his way. When the latter had finished speaking he went and threw himself into an easy chair and mopped his face, exclaiming,—

"Ouf! how hot it is, it makes me want to do nothing but sleep."

"That is true," replied the baroness, "one's head is so heavy that one's eyes close in spite of one's self."

"Do they both of them want to go to sleep?" said Belatout to himself. "She's a baroness and he's a major, that's all I know up to the present. They are very fashionable, very distinguished looking. But this gentleman paid no more attention to me than if I had not been there. Is it the fashion in Paris to go to sleep during the day? This gentleman has done so, for he is snoring a little, but the lady is still beating time with her little foot. Up to the present this drawing-room affords little gratification to me; I'd rather go back to my daughter that I may not fall asleep with them; perhaps this is a way of making acquaintance in Paris."

Belatout was still undecided as to what he should do when the arrival of another gentleman changed the situation. The latter was a gentleman who was neither young nor old, one of those persons whose age is undetermined, because they are always very

careful in their dress and preserve in their tone and language a youthful manner. His face was refined and clever, his smile slightly satirical; he wore a very black, slight mustache, which was a great deal blacker than his hair, in fact, and the two points of which, well waxed and turned up almost to his whiskers, gave him somewhat the look of a cat; to those who are fond of the last-mentioned animal this gentleman would have seemed a handsome fellow.

In contradistinction to the major, who had paid not the slightest attention to Belatout, the newcomer saluted him courteously on coming into the room; then looking around him he exclaimed,—

"What! are they gone to sleep? why, that would be too absurd in the middle of the day. The major is rather given that way, it is true, but Madame Vanilley!—"

"I'm not asleep, my dear friend," muttered the lady half rising, "but I am resting."

"And is that the way you keep monsieur company? a new arrival at this hotel, as I have just learned from our host. M. de Montabord, I believe? to whom we ought to do the honors of the house."

Belatout bowed and smiled in the most winning manner possible to him. Delighted at the polished manners of this gentleman he muttered,—

"Monsieur, really, you are extremely kind."

"Not at all, my dear monsieur; why, when

strangers come to Paris is it not the duty of those who live in the capital to do the honors of it? Monsieur is a Prussian?"

"Quite otherwise; I am from Bar-le-Duc."

"Oh, the country whence come such excellent jams!" cried the baroness.

"Did you come to Paris on business or on pleasure? Pardon me for asking that, I perhaps seem inquisitive to you, but I asked purely in your interest. You see in me a man who goes much into society and therefore more likely to be agreeable or useful to you — Hector de Cracoville, at your service, of independent fortune, possessing several estates — country houses which I rarely visit because it bores me. Paris is the only place that suits me. But I like to be my own master, and for that reason I live at a hotel. It is vastly more convenient, for if one does not keep house one does not have to receive. On the other hand, I go everywhere, I have Paris at the tips of my fingers. There's not an establishment of any consequence that I have not visited, not a play at any of the theatres that I haven't seen, not a ball I have not attended, not an artist, a celebrated man whom I do not know. And that's why I offer my services to you."

Belatout bowed again as he said,—

"Certainly, monsieur, I shall be delighted to —"

M. de Cracoville, who had the habit of always

speaking and of rarely allowing others to speak, interrupted him again.

"You see, dear monsieur, that I can act as your guide in all that you wish to do in Paris, and it will be a great pleasure to me to do so. I put myself entirely at your service. I am fortunate in being able to oblige you."

"Monsieur, it proves your—"

"That is my disposition. In the first place, I must always be on the move—going about—movement is my life— my element."

"Certainly, if one is moving—"

"For instance, here is Major Tourte, he's an excellent fellow, but he's no good except at the table or at a game of cards. When he isn't either eating or playing, he's asleep. But I maintain, monsieur, that a man was not made to spend so much time in sleep."

"Ah, you think that—"

"By Jove, sleep is time lost, it is so many hours that we cut from our existence."

"However, people have to—"

"Yes, we must rest when we are tired; but as little as possible, monsieur, as little as possible. You have your daughter here, monsieur?"

"Why, how did you know that?"

"I told you that I know everything. When new persons come to live at this hotel you can understand that my first care is to get some information about them; so many rascally fellows come

to Paris, my dear monsieur, one has to know as far as possible with whom one has to deal."

"What, do you mean to say rascals, cheats, thieves, come from the provinces?"

"From the provinces and from abroad — they come from everywhere. All my experience is necessary to prevent my being duped. I suppose you came to Paris to show this beautiful city to your daughter?"

"Not entirely; I have also to get information concerning a young madcap whose father begged me to let him know what his son was doing here."

"All right. We'll easily find out all about him. What is the young man's name?"

"M. Eugène Belatout."

"That's enough. Before long you'll have news of him. Do you want to see him? To speak to him?"

"No, no; he knows me, and if he knew I was here he would be on his guard."

"Very well, but he doesn't know me, and I won't lose sight of him. I'll keep you informed of his goings on."

"Really, that will be very kind of you, M. de Crac —"

"— De Cracoville. Will you do me the honor of presenting me to your daughter?"

"Certainly, with the greatest pleasure."

Belatout went up to his apartments with his new acquaintance, where he found his daughter in tears

because she was so far from the one she loved, and Friquette, who was endeavoring to console her by saying,—

"Why, mamzelle, M. Marcelin knows that we are in Paris; don't fret, he will be here soon himself."

M. Belatout, displeased at finding his daughter crying, said to her,—

"Diana, allow me to present M. de Cracoville, who is kind enough to offer to show us about Paris, which he knows thoroughly well. But your eyes are full of tears, what does that mean?"

"Monsieur, it is nothing," said Friquette, "mamzelle was thinking of her little canary that she left behind her; she's afraid Marianne won't be careful about it and that it will fly away."

"What childishness, to cry about a bird."

"Mademoiselle," said De Cracoville, bowing to Diana, "we will do our best to render your stay in Paris agreeable and to make you forget your canary. Such beautiful eyes as yours were not made to shed tears. Come, my dear M. de Montabord, where are you going to take mademoiselle today?"

"Where am I going to take her? Faith I had no intention of taking her anywhere."

"What! you are not going to profit by the beautiful weather we are enjoying to take mademoiselle to the Bois-de-Boulogne? That would be a mistake. Mademoiselle positively must make acquaintance with the Bois-de-Boulogne, the meet-

ing-place of all that we have of the best in Paris. There's a livery stable near here, and I'll go and tell one of the hotel people to bring you a pretty barouche in which you can be comfortable—"

"A barouche! but I shan't know which road to take."

"Be easy as to that, I'm going with you, I won't leave you and I'll point out to you and tell you the names of all the celebrities we meet in the Bois, where they make appointments."

"Ah, if you'll only come with us, M. de Cracoville, I will cheerfully do as you suggest."

"Oh, monsieur, won't you take me with you to the Bois," said Friquette, pouting in such a charming fashion that the gentleman who looked like a cat exclaimed,—

"Why, what a nice little thing she is. Yes, of course we can take you, my child, you shall sit on the box beside the coachman. I'll leave mademoiselle to make any little changes in her toilet and in a quarter of an hour I'll come for you; the barouche will be waiting below. I won't say good-by, M. de Montabord."

"He's very pleasant, is that gentleman," said Friquette when the elegant De Cracoville had gone.

"He called me 'de' Montabord," said Belatout to himself as he arranged the knot of his cravat before a glass. "He's a man who moves in the very highest society, one can see that at a glance?"

Diana dried her eyes then, as the prospect of

a drive in a barouche was by no means disagreeable to her; she smiled at Friquette, who was jumping for joy in her room.

At seventeen a smile pierces so easily through a mist of tears.

CHAPTER VIII

A Dangerous Friend

So M. Belatout and Mademoiselle Diana started off to the Bois-de-Boulogne in a fine barouche drawn by two beautiful white horses and driven by a coachman in a fanciful livery. The father and daughter sat in the back seat of the carriage, but opposite them was the elegant De Cracoville, who was continually bowing to other people in carriages or making signs of recognition to horsemen; then he would lean towards Belatout and say to him impressively,—

"That is a State Councillor. That's the Marchioness Granilovas, the sister of the ambassador of—something or other. Ah, here comes one of our first genre painters. And there—do you see the young woman in that victoria, she is an actress at the Français, she has unlimited talent—an actress of the very first order. I've her name on the tip of my tongue yet I can't for the life of me remember it just at this moment. That horseman I just bowed to is a celebrated journalist; when he reviews a play he always attacks or praises the author personally, he never mentions the play—he's a most original fellow. This gentleman sitting

alone in his carriage is one of the richest bankers in Paris!"

"Deuce take it!" said Belatout, "I see that many important persons frequent the Bois-de-Boulogne."

"All the best people, the cream of Paris — the very best. I hope you don't regret coming. Where are you going to dine this evening?"

"Dine? don't people usually dine at their hotels?"

"No, they don't keep a table d'hote there; they have the meals brought from a restaurant, a very bad plan, everything is cold by the time it reaches one. You must go to one of the best restaurants of Paris, and there are some excellent ones."

"Do you know them?"

"Do I know them? I frequent those only. You must dine at Brebant's, formerly Vachette's, at the corner of the Faubourg Montmartre, it is one of the best restaurants in Paris."

"Will you do us the pleasure of dining with us?"

"That was really my intention. Since you allow me to be your guide, your pilot, I don't propose to leave you, provided my company is agreeable to you?"

"If it is agreeable? Why, I really don't know how to express my gratitude for your extreme kindness and willingness to oblige — for —"

"Spare me your thanks, my dear M. Montabord. From the first moment that I saw you, I said to myself, 'There is a gentleman who is un-

acquainted with Paris. I must not let him be the prey of every schemer, and there are so many in this city. I'll attach myself to him.' "

"Really, M. de Crac—de Craqueville—"

"Cracoville."

"I am very fortunate in meeting you."

"It is after six and we'll go on to Brebant's, where we'll dismiss the carriage, which will take back your little servant to the hotel."

"Can not Friquette come with us to the restaurant?" asked Diana.

"Your waiting-woman is called Friquette, is she? What an odd name. Mademoiselle, it is not the custom to take one's people to dine at the same restaurant as one's self. But rest assured they'll look after her at the hotel."

"There's my servant also," said Belatout, "Jacquet is such a very simple fellow. He does not know where I am and he'll think he's lost."

"He'll wait at the hotel. Don't put yourself out for your servants, people will laugh at you."

"You're perfectly right, one can't put himself out for his servants."

The coachman was ordered by De Cracoville to drive the party to Brebant's, after which he was to take Friquette back to the hotel. The little maid established herself on the back seat of the barouche, saying to her mistress,—

"Oh, mamzelle, I should like to pass my life rolling along like this."

They dined in a hall where several persons were already seated at table.

"It's more cheerful than a private room, which also is apt to give rise to suspicions among people of a certain class in Paris. However, perhaps you prefer a private room?"

"No, indeed, I came to see Paris and its inhabitants, I don't want to dine in a private room. Only I shall beg you to have the kindness to order the dinner yourself; for I don't know what one should eat in Paris, I don't understand any of the customs here."

"I was about to propose it to you myself. Don't meddle with anything. I am your pilot, let me also be your commander. Nobody can compete with me in ordering a dinner."

In fact, this gentleman ordered a dinner in which nothing was lacking, neither the first fruits and vegetables of the season, nor truffles, nor a Roman punch, nor ices, nor rare wines. Belatout was delighted, exclaiming as he tasted each new dish,—

"Delicious! perfect. I ought to have known that the cooking here would be much better than in our neighborhood. Is it not so, daughter?"

Diana, who, like most young girls, loved dainties, was of the same opinion as her father, and De Cracoville exclaimed,—

"Rest assured that with me you will never dine otherwise."

But when, later, the waiter presented the bill to

M. Belatout, the latter opened his eyes affrightedly and frowningly exclaimed,—

"By Jove, how dear they are."

"A thing is never too dear when it is good," said De Cracoville, rising from the table.

And the country gentleman paid without a murmur.

While dining they had agreed to go to a theatre in the evening, and accordingly they wended their way to the Opéra-Comique, and De Cracoville pushed Belatout towards the ticket office, saying,—

"Ask for three balcony seats."

"Why does he not get them himself," mused Belatout, buying the tickets, however, as he reflected that perhaps it might be the custom in Paris to take to the play the people whom one had invited to dinner.

The play pleased Diana very much, but it sent Belatout to sleep. They walked back to the hotel. It was past midnight, and they found Jacquet seated on a post at the door of the hotel crying like a calf.

"What are you doing there, idiot?" asked his master.

"Oh, monsieur, I thought you were lost, you and mademoiselle, and I was asking myself what in the world I was going to do in Paris."

Everybody had retired. Diana related to her little servant all that they had done during the evening.

"Mamzelle," said Friquette, "this M. Craque —who is so polished seems to me like a cunning, sharp fellow who is inveigling your father—but so much the better; it will serve our turn very well."

"How so, Friquette?"

"Leave me be, I have my ideas."

"You always have ideas, and you never tell me what they are."

"It would take too long to explain to you."

"And what about Marcelin?"

"M. Marcelin knows that we are in Paris. A while ago I sent him our address at this hotel; and it won't be long before he'll come prowling around here."

"But if my father should meet him, he'll be furious."

"He won't recognize him. I told him to smear his face a bit."

"What! do you want him to transform himself into a negro!"

"Oh, mamzelle, without making himself look like a negro altogether there are a thousand ways of disguising himself so as to render himself unrecognizable. See here, if I were a man and wanted to see my sweetheart I'd thrust myself into an umbrella case."

"Oh, Friquette, you don't mean that!"

"It's a way of telling you that I should have been capable of anything."

A week rolled by, during which M. de Cracoville hardly quitted Belatout, whom he constantly invited to dine with him, and then left him to pay the bill, saying,—

"I shall have my turn."

But Diana did not again accompany her father; she preferred to remain at the hotel, where Friquette charged herself with preparing the meals. Belatout was quite as well pleased not to have his daughter always hanging on his arm, and De Cracoville said to him,—

"You do well not to embarrass yourself constantly with your charming daughter. There are a thousand places in Paris where a man cannot go when he has a woman with him, it's awkward."

"Yes, that's my idea too. But this young Eugène Belatout, whose conduct I am so anxious to learn, you haven't learned anything about him, I suppose?"

"Not yet; but it won't be long before I shall. Only you told me he lodged at a hotel in the Rue Richelieu near the Palais-Royal; I've visited them all and I can certify that your young man isn't there."

"Really, why where the devil can he have hidden himself?"

"Deuce take it, if you'd had his right address we should long ago have found out all about him. But with a little patience I'll answer for it we shall discover him. It seems to me you ought not to

allow yourself to be dull in Paris. I'll do what I can to render your stay agreeable."

"Yes, no doubt; oh, I shan't be dull here, only the living is a little dear."

"By Jove! money is made to spend. Your fortune allows you to lead an agreeable life."

"Oh, yes, my means allow me to live—handsomely."

"Let's see — what shall we do this evening?"

Friquette, who came running up, interrupted this conversation to tell her master that Jacquet, who had broken the windows of a pastry-cook's shop, was now at the guard house and had referred to him.

"The idiot is always doing something stupid!" exclaimed Belatout. "Excuse me, my dear M. de Cracoville, for I must go and free my servant. I will return soon."

Belatout had gone, and Friquette remained in the common room, where she pretended to be admiring a very bad picture. De Cracoville seemed to be reflecting, and said to himself,—

"Will the pigeon allow one to feed him, I wonder. The deuce! this is perhaps the time when I ought to pay for something in my turn — not that I like to do it, for I am so used to making others pay for me — but once isn't a habit."

Perceiving at this juncture that Friquette was still there, De Cracoville approached the little maid and tapped her on the cheek,—

"Good-day, Mademoiselle Friquette."

"Monsieur is very kind."

"Have you been long in M. Montabord's service?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur. I came into it when quite little."

"Then you know his tastes, his habits?"

"Yes, monsieur, I know my master as well as if I had made him."

"I think I've noticed that he doesn't care for the play?"

"No, it makes him go to sleep—"

"Does he like cards?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur, he's very fond of cards; he will pass a whole night playing them; but he doesn't want to admit it before his daughter."

"Oh, very well! He's fond of a good dinner—but he hardly drinks anything."

"Wine do you mean? oh, he drinks it like everybody else."

"You've never seen him tipsy?"

"Oh, well—I mustn't say. If monsieur should get to know that I was talking about his faults?"

"Don't be afraid, little Friquette; all that I ask of you is in your master's interests. I've a great liking for him, that's why I want to get information as to his tastes, his likings."

"If you want to be agreeable to monsieur, you must make him drink some punch."

"Some punch! ah, he likes punch, then?"

"He has a passion for it."

"Rum punch?"

"Rum, kirsch, brandy — all kinds."

"It is very good to know that."

"You won't tell him that I told you that."

"You may be sure I won't. Wait, my pretty Friquette, take this for the information you've given me."

And M. de Cracoville departed after slipping a ten-sous piece into Friquette's hand. The little maid looked at what the gentleman had given her.

"Ten sous — fifty centimes," she said to herself. "Why, for a scented fop he isn't generous — he's a stingy curmudgeon, is this fine gentleman."

Belatout brought Jacquet back with him; the latter wept as he swore to his master that he had not broken the pastrycook's window in order to steal cakes. Our provincial returned to the drawing-room, but found nobody there. Madame de Vanilley had gone for some days into the country; Major Tourte passed a great part of his time at a café, and Belatout felt quite out of place now that he did not find his faithful De Cracoville to take him about Paris; for although he sometimes grumbled to himself that his new friend never paid, though he continually repeated that he would have his turn, he had so got into the habit of going out only with De Cracoville that he hesitated to venture alone in Paris.

Belatout went back to his apartments, called Friquette, and said to her,—

"M. de Cracoville has left no word for me?"

"No, monsieur."

"He didn't tell you to ask me to wait for him?"

"No, monsieur, the fine gentleman did not say anything about that. But he did say something else."

"What was that?"

"In the first place, everything that was complimentary to you, monsieur—that he could see you were a gentleman of birth, that you had all the manners, all the language of a race—"

"Of what race?"

"Oh, I don't know, but it must be a famous one."

Belatout cleared his throat, went to the mirror and spread out the knot of his embroidered cravat.

Friquette continued,—

"Only he added 'He lacks but one thing to be well received at our clubs, and if he had that quality he would be a perfect gentleman!' Yes, that's what he said—a perfect gentleman."

"And what is lacking to prevent me from being a perfect gentleman? Come, tell me quickly."

"M. de Craque said: 'Your master doesn't drink deep, he would not be able to hold his own with the youngest members of the club. It's a pity that a Frenchman shouldn't be able to compete with Englishmen?'"

"Pshaw! so it's necessary to drink deep to be quite a gentleman? He thinks, I presume, that I don't know how to drink! Why, if I wished, I could drink him under the table, this good fellow! — only I don't wish to, for fear of making myself ill."

A waiter came to tell M. Belatout that M. de Cracoville was waiting for him in the drawing-room, and our countryman hurried to join him there.

"A thousand pardons, my dear fellow, for having disturbed you," said De Cracoville, "but I am charged with a message to you. I feared I should be indiscreet to go to your apartment, as your daughter might be there, and fathers don't always want their children to know all that they do."

"What is it you want of me, my dear sir?"

"Major Tourte has a little gathering of his friends at the restaurant he habitually frequents; after dinner they'll have a game of cards, some punch and so forth, and he begged me to tell you that he should feel highly honored if you would accept his invitation."

"Really! Do you mean to say Major Tourte has invited me? Why this gentleman never spoke to me; he's always been asleep in the drawing-room when I've met him."

"He sometimes makes a pretence of going to sleep — he's a man who talks very little, but he has the highest esteem for you, and what I have told

him of your wit and your amiability has augmented it still further."

"You are a thousand times too good, but to accept this invitation from a man who has never spoken a single word to me seems — "

"In Paris, my dear fellow, that's the only way one makes acquaintances — at an unceremonious dinner, where only men are present. And then what should make you determine to come is the fact that among his guests the major will have a certain M. Spiterman, a very rich young German, who is, it seems, very intimate with this young Eugène Belatout about whom you wish to obtain some information."

"He is intimate with my — with young Belatout. Why then I shall no longer hesitate, my dear fellow. I accept Major Croute's invitation."

"No, not Croute! Tourte."

"That's what I meant to say. I will be with you."

"The major will be delighted. Then at six o'clock I'll call for you and take you to the restaurant at the Champs Élysées, where the major will entertain us; be ready, my dear Montabord."

"At six o'clock; that is understood. Oh, by the way, must I wear full dress?"

"By no means — a male dinner party is entirely without ceremony. You'll do perfectly well as you are now."

"I shall wear straw-colored gloves."

"As you like. Well, I'll see you presently."

De Cracoville shook Belatout's hand effusively, and the latter went back to his daughter, to whom he said,—

"I hope today to get some news of my rascal of a son."

CHAPTER IX

A Stag Dinner

Indifferent as his conduct may seem to the reader, M. Belatout could not avoid being cognizant of the fact that his daughter was not likely to find much entertainment in remaining in a strange hotel with no companion but her maid, while her father passed his time in dining in the city and in visiting public places, so on this occasion he said to Diana,—

"I give you leave to go for a little walk on the boulevard today, my darling, accompanied by your little maid Friquette, on condition that you are always followed by Jacquet; but you must try not to lose sight of the fellow, as happened twice before when you went out."

"Why, it was not us who lost Jacquet!" cried Friquette, "it was he who lost us, the great booby stops to look in at every shop window; mademoiselle and I keep on walking, and instead of running after us to catch up with us, M. Jacquet stays in the same place or goes back the way he came, calling, 'Friquette! Friquette, where are you?' so that he makes every one turn to look at him and the street urchins follow him crying with him,

'Where are you, Friquette?' The last time he came back to the hotel followed by a crowd of little rascals who were bawling, 'Where are you Friquette?' That's not so very pleasant, monsieur. You had better have left Jacquet at Bar-le-Duc."

"I acknowledge that the fellow is a perfect simpleton — but you must manage so that you don't lose sight of him."

"Then, monsieur, you'll have to buy him a collar and we'll tie a ribbon to it and hold him in the leash like a dog. Why, monsieur, trust me to look out for Mamzelle Diana, I'll answer to you for her, and then, besides, in broad daylight on the boulevards no one can possibly say anything to us. In the first place, we never go where there's a crowd, and if a man comes too close to me I simply strike out at him with my foot — as if I were a mule. I assure you he doesn't come back!"

Friquette had excellent reasons for desiring that Jacquet should not follow them; twice before when they had gone out they had seen the amorous Marcelin, who, unable to see Diana at the hotel where she was staying with her father, prowled incessantly in the neighborhood, hoping that with Friquette's help he would be able to exchange a few words with Diana. Since he had been in Paris, Marcelin passed all his time in waiting until his well-beloved should show herself, and sometimes a whole day passed without his seeing anybody, either mistress or servant; this did not prevent

his beginning again the next day, for lovers are like cats — possessed of much patience.

But when Diana, accompanied by her maid, had seen M. Marcelin at a distance she had said to Friquette,—

"If Jacquet sees M. Marcelin speak to me he will tell my father," to which the little maid immediately replied,—

"Be tranquil as to that, mamzelle; we are going to lose Jacquet, that will be very easy to do."

And, in fact, the next moment Jacquet was vainly looking about him everywhere, for those whom he should have followed had totally disappeared.

It is a commission very difficult of accomplishment, that of watching over two young girls, and only a countryman like M. Belatout would have confided such a task to Jacquet.

At six o'clock the elegant De Cracoville had promptly arrived in a victoria to call for Belatout, who, despite the gentleman's advice, had thought fit to put on his evening clothes to partake of this dinner offered by Major Tourte, who as yet had done nothing but sleep when in his presence.

As they got into the carriage De Cracoville looked at Belatout and exclaimed,—

"How fine you are; so you persisted in getting yourself up for the occasion."

"Oh, you know how it is — the first time that one goes to any one's house."

"But we're not going to the major's house, he's entertaining at a restaurant — an excellent one, I grant you, almost at the entrance to the Bois-de-Boulogne, a few steps from the Arc d'Triomphe. We shall be well taken care of, I promise you. The major is an epicure, a gourmand, and I warned him that you were a connoisseur in wines."

"Really, you told him that?"

"It is but the truth. I've noticed that you are never deceived as to the age of the wine with which you are served."

"Do you mean it? Well, it must be the bouquet which guides me. Shall we be many at dinner?"

"No, only seven or eight, I think."

"And all men? — no women at all?"

"Ah, slyboots! I believe you wouldn't be displeased to find some of them there — you must be fond of the ladies — a gay deceiver!"

"Me, not a bit of it! I've never had a thought of such a thing."

"You needn't tell me that. With your face and figure you must undoubtedly have made conquests everywhere!"

"But I haven't been anywhere, I have stayed, rather too closely, perhaps, at home in my province; and then I was married."

"But you have been a widower for a long time, haven't you?"

"Yes, quite a long time, but I am very domesticated, I never stir from Bar-le-Duc. But if I

had done so, I don't say but what—in fact, there are some very pretty women in Paris. They have such fine figures and such eyes! they look at you in so engaging a manner that if one dared one would like to make acquaintance with them straight away."

"By Jove! you must dare, my dear fellow; with your advantages I'll answer for it you won't find them hardhearted."

"You think not? But I am in Paris with my daughter—and I could not permit myself to—to—you understand what I mean?"

"I understand that if you were to make a conquest you could not bring her to your hotel, but nothing would prevent your going to visit her. The days and the evenings are long."

"That's true, they are very long—the evenings especially."

"This young German baron whom you are desirous of meeting has a ravishing mistress."

"M. Spiterman, who knows young Belatout?"

"Exactly."

"So he has a beautiful mistress?"

"An adorable woman, face, figure, bearing, she unites perfection in them all, a woman of the very highest society. She is very good form and gives fêtes, parties to which all Paris goes."

"Then she must have a very large house."

"When I say all Paris, I mean all the best people."

"And are you paying court to this fair dame?"

"No, there's hardly a chance of my doing so, that deuced baron never leaves her; he is horribly jealous of her."

"So the German is jealous?"

"As jealous as a tiger or a negro."

"If he never leaves this lady he will bring her to dine with us, I suppose?"

"Oh, there's no fear of that! If he brought her to a dinner party composed of men — and of men who have not yet renounced the art of pleasing — he would be on thorns, would poor Spiterman. The more so that the fair Ethelwina — for that's the lady's name — "

"Ethelwina? She's a Swede then?"

"No, she calls herself Scotch and asserts that she descends from the famous chieftain Rob Roy."

"By Jove! she's descended from a king?"

"No, the chief of a clan, but it matters little from whom she is descended. A pretty woman needs no patent of nobility to make her pleasing. Feminine charms are worth more than musty parchments. Is not that your opinion also, my dear Montabord? I'd give a whole chest of parchments for a little turned-up nose and a shapely leg."

"I share your opinion as to the well-formed leg — but not as to the turned-up nose, for I prefer them aquiline. Then I'm not likely to see the fair Scotchwoman? I'm sorry for it, for you've

piqued my curiosity. Does she wear a little short jacket? Oh, how foolish I am, it is the men and not the women who wear that singular costume."

"Madame Ethelwina dresses perfectly, she even sets the fashions and she employs the first dressmakers in Paris; but I must tell you right here that this charming woman is not a bit prudish."

"Oh, she's not — and what do you mean by prudish?"

"I mean to say that there are some of these ladies before whom one dare not say anything jocular, who take offence and assume a severe expression if one relates an anecdote that's in the least degree lively; but the fair Ethelwina is not so, she's the first to laugh at a risky story, for she's very jolly in her temperament, her teeth are so very pretty when she laughs that it would be a great pity for her not to be cheerful."

"Really, you give me an intense desire to know this lady."

"Well, perhaps you will see her at the hotel, she sometimes comes there to call on Madame Vanilley, with whom she is very intimate."

"Ah, she knows Madame Vanilley?"

"They are intimate friends; that was how I first became acquainted with the — the Countess Ethelwina."

"She's a countess, hey?"

"Perhaps even a marchioness, I'm not quite sure as to that."

"I haven't exchanged more than half a dozen perfunctory words with Madame de Vanilley — I have not called on her."

"That's your own fault — you are too timid. Madame de Vanilley holds you in the deepest esteem — she comes back from the country tomorrow, and I'll make you more fully acquainted with her. But here we are!"

The victoria stopped before a very fine restaurant. As they alighted De Cracoville said to the coachman,—

"You will return and await us here."

"At what hour?"

"Towards midnight."

"What, do you think we shall remain at the table until midnight?"

"No, but after dinner we always have a game of cards; that is the custom."

"That's right, I'll very willingly take a hand at cards."

They showed these gentlemen into a room where six men were already gathered; first of all came Major Tourte, then the German, Spiterman; the latter was a big, fair man, verging on red, still a very fine man, though rather heavily built. This gentleman was thirty-six years old and his features were regular enough, but his expression was anything but amiable; he maintained habitually an air of self-sufficiency and an authoritative tone which was likely to offend those who did not know him.

He had great china-blue eyes, a big nose, very red, fat cheeks, and big whiskers of the same color, which hung down like the ears of a spaniel. For all that, this gentleman believed himself immensely good-looking; he took the greatest care of his toilet, his teeth, his hands, his nails, and poisoned the air with tobacco when fifteen steps distant.

Beside the baron was a little man who was always laughing and skipping about, he was dressed in the latest fashion, wore a little disk of glass in his right eye and went at frequent intervals to look in the glass, put his hands though his hair, smile at himself, pull down his waistcoat and come back humming to listen to what Spiterman was saying.

"Charming, delightful," he muttered, "you tell such ravishing things. If I were a journalist, I should profit by it; unfortunately, I am not one and the public loses a good deal."

The German listened to this as though he were perfectly aware of it, and occasionally smiling slightly at his admirer and continuing to talk. A tall, very thin, very straight gentleman, who kept somewhat at a distance, did not seem to share the little man's admiration for the stories told by the baron, he even yawned sometimes and tried to cover it by coughing. In a corner were seated two other individuals who were of those types which nature only produces among the Israelites. These gentlemen were animatedly talking of affairs on 'Change and the sales of the hotel Druot. The one who

was named Abraham wore a gold chain with which one need not have been afraid to draw water from a well; the other had rings on all his fingers and wore earrings.

The major came to meet the newcomers and presented them to the company, who already knew De Cracoville, then he thanked Belatout for having agreed to be of their party, saying to him,—

"But you shall be pleased, we shall be well served, well entertained — the cellar is good, it's dear, but we shall get the worth of our money."

"What does it matter to me if it's dear?" said Belatout to himself, "since it is he who is entertaining us. In the country we don't say such things as that, but perhaps it's the custom in Paris."

De Cracoville came near and took Belatout by the arm and said in his ear,—

"The big handsome man who is talking over there is Baron Spiterman."

"I thought it was, he has a very German face."

"The little scented fop who is skipping about as he listens to him is young Mirza, an artist who paints miniatures — he is a perfect fool over the baron; he's made six portraits of him already."

"Six — does he expose them for sale?"

"No, they are all for the baron, who sheds his portraits broadcast on the ladies who admire him. Mirza has painted him in six different costumes and he is now, I believe, painting him again."

"Oh, and how?"

"We'll ask him that at dinner. That thin gentleman is interested in railways. He's a man who has a long arm."

"He has very long legs also."

"I meant to say by that that he has very fine acquaintances and is therefore influential and can render great services."

"And that fat father who has such a heavy gold chain? It must stifle him to carry the thing."

"That's M. Abraham, a rich dealer in jewelry and precious stones; he has sacrificed a million to marry his daughter to a Catholic."

"I've heard of Abraham's sacrifice, but not that one. That gentleman who's talking with him and who has—"

"No, that's a young Hungarian who has come to Paris to study business methods; he adores jewelry, he can't see a bauble without having a desire for it."

"If he has a desire for those belonging to others it may prove dangerous."

"He is rich, he can satisfy all fancies."

De Cracoville left Belatout to go and talk in a low tone with the major in a corner. Belatout, feeling rather embarrassed what to do with himself among all these gentlemen, who continued to talk among themselves, approached M. Spiterman, who was relating how while swimming on his back, or in other words, "en faisant la planche," he had saved a young girl who had thrown herself into the water because of a disappointment in love.

The story promised to be a long one, for the baron wanted to have it understood that the young lady, having been flung on him by a wave, had found his company so much to her liking that on reaching dry land she entirely renounced the idea of self-destruction. Belatout hoped the history would have an end that he might enter into conversation with M. Spiterman and obtain some information about his son; but they came to announce dinner while the baron was still floating on his back with the young girl in tow.

"Dinner! dinner!" cried M. Abraham, darting towards the door. Every one else did the same; Belatout was astonished that the major did not do the honors better and make his guests pass in before him, but, instead of this, that gentleman was one of the first to seat himself at the table, which was laid in a neighboring room. Each guest seated himself where he pleased; De Cracoville was careful to place Belatout beside himself.

Little Mirza took a place near his friend Spiterman, singing,—

I'm going to forage, forage, forage,
Until I'm satisfied.

The dinner was vigorously attacked, the gentlemen of the jewels were served with soup twice. Then they passed the madeira, and M. Abraham, who seemed determined to make many sacrifices, kept the bottle before him, saying,—

"I'm willing to drink madeira all through the

dinner, or at least, very frequently, and I want to have it ready to my hand."

"As for me, give me Johannisberg," said Spiterman, "that is the wine I prefer."

"And me, Moet frappé!" exclaimed the artist, Mirza.

"You see," said De Cracoville to Belatout, "no one is restrained here; each one takes the wine he prefers."

"That is true—your major does things generously. It is princely. Then I shall ask for some beaune—old beaune. But I should very much like to talk to the baron on the subject of that young man—that Eugène Belatout whom I'm looking for in Paris."

"It will be easy to do so—the baron loves to talk—you must have noticed that he's always talking."

"Yes, he's talking of his love adventures, and his history of the young girl he saved while floating on his back has lasted a long time."

"Leave it to me—I'll interrogate him."

"Excellent fish!" exclaimed M. Abraham, "faith I'll make a martyr of myself and ask for some more of it."

"Take care, Papa Abraham," said little Mirza, "if you make a martyr of yourself thus at the first service you won't be capable of doing anything to the entrées."

"Don't be afraid. I am always capable. I once

remained at a table forty-eight hours without ceasing to eat."

"Forty-eight hours! that's magnificent."

"You mean it's frightful."

"Gentlemen," said the baron, "I know an Englishwoman who ate a whole leg of mutton for her dinner."

"Zounds! what a determined hussy she must have been."

"I fell out with her myself because she wanted to carry cold fried pork chops to the theatre to eat instead of bonbons. She was a fine woman, if you like! But she had a sister with whom I had quite a spicy adventure which I must tell you. This sister was named Kretlekratle."

"By Jove!" said Belatout, "now we are in for a long story — and my young man — "

"Wait a bit! wait a bit!"

De Cracoville was addressing M. Spiterman, who was beginning his new story.

"Pray excuse me, baron, sorry to interrupt you, but M. de Montabord here wants to get some information from you."

"About Mademoiselle Kretlekratle? Wait, I'm just going to tell you."

"No, it's not the damsel he's bothering about, but a young man you know well, they say, one Eugène Belatout."

"Young Belatout! Yes, of course I know him. He's a charming young fellow! well, what of him?"

"Well, his conduct in Paris, isn't it rather fast?"

"His conduct is much the same as that of all young men who wish to and ought to enjoy themselves, only this poor Eugène has an idiot of a father, an old fogy who doesn't want him to enjoy himself."

"Monsieur," said Belatout, who had felt the color fly to his face, "has not a father the right to watch over his son without being an idiot or an old fogy?"

"No, monsieur, when a man sends his son to Paris he should not be displeased if the latter wishes to taste the pleasures which the city offers. A boy must be expected to do foolish things. Why, I repeat Father Belatout is a fool, with all the prejudices of a countryman. He's incapable of enjoying himself and he doesn't want the young men to enjoy themselves. That's the whole story."

Belatout bit his lips and struck the table with his knife, as he muttered,—

"Faith, that's easily said! I don't understand how you can say anybody is a fool without knowing him, and you don't know young Eugène's father."

"Thank God, no — nor have I any desire to know him; I judge people by their actions. That's enough for me. Well, to return to young Kretlekratle."

"Pardon me, baron, but have you seen Eugène Belatout lately?"

"Why, hang it man, will you never have done with your questions? Do you think that I came here to talk about Eugène Belatout?"

"I only want to know his address that I may send it to one of my friends."

"His address! how should I know it? He comes to see me, I don't go to see him. What need have I of his address? I'm trying to tell these gentlemen a charming story, and you keep interrupting me with questions that haven't the slightest connection with what I am saying. Allow me to speak, I beg of you; my adventure with Kretlekratle was far more amusing than all your Belatouts."

"Yes, yes, adventures with women," exclaimed little Mirza, "that's the only thing I care to hear talked about. Are you not of the same opinion, fatty Abraham?"

"Oh, at table, I'd rather eat than talk, one can't eat and speak at the same time."

Belatout said nothing more; but while the baron related his new adventure he incessantly rapped on the table with his knife, which made Spiterman so impatient that he suddenly stopped and, addressing himself to the offender, said,—

"Monsieur, do you think my words have need of an accompaniment?"

"What makes you ask that, baron?"

"Because you are continually rapping with your knife all the time I'm talking."

"It's an old habit, monsieur."

"If it's a habit will you not stop it to oblige me? if you are doing it to prevent yourself from hearing me talk, I warn you, monsieur, that I shall look upon it as an insult and demand satisfaction."

"Why, what does this mean?" cried De Cracoville. "What, baron, are you vexed because M. de Montabord is playing with his knife? Why, that is done in the finest gatherings. My dear friend certainly had no intention of offending you, and to prove it to you he'll drink to you in your Johannisberg which we should like to taste also."

Belatout immediately held out his glass, bowing very graciously to Spiterman, who deigned then to pour some wine saying,—

"I wish you luck. I'm perfectly willing to drink with you, but for goodness' sake give your knife a little peace."

"I won't touch it again, baron."

M. Spiterman resumed the relation of his love adventure with Kretlekratle. But although Belatout had ceased to rap on the table with his knife, they paid little attention to the baron, for each guest had arrived at that point of the dinner where he wanted to talk himself and did not listen to anybody else. They had partaken so freely of the different wines that were on the table that all the faces were red and excited, and it was who could speak loudest and shout the most. Belatout himself, not wishing to seem incapable of drinking as

deep as these gentlemen, had accepted all the toasts, drank all the healths they had suggested and all the brandy they had offered him, and when they left the table to go into the drawing-room to have coffee he took M. Abraham's arm, saying,—

"Faith, major, you do things well — this is a dinner which does you honor, I am struck with admiration."

And fat Abraham laughed as he answered,—

"Yes, yes, I can see that you are struck — with admiration. But the bill will be a famous one, if we get out of it for forty francs a head we shall do well. But pshaw, I shall win my shot at lansquenet."

Belatout did not understand; only he began to see that he was not talking to the major and said to M. Abraham with a bow,—

"Excuse me, it was your gold chain which deceived me — the major has one also."

"Tourte? his chain is imitation, not worth fifteen francs, while mine is worth six hundred francs cold cash! not a sou less. Would you like to have it? It's all the same to me, if it pleases you I'll let you have it — five hundred francs down — I shall lose a hundred francs by the transaction, but I can afford it. Is it a bargain?"

M. Abraham was about to take off his chain, but Belatout stopped him, saying,—

"Why, no, I have not the slightest desire for your chain. I would rather have some coffee."

"Then why the devil did you mention it to me? You see I'm all for business. If you want to take it at four hundred and fifty francs, well, we can settle it so. I am very free-handed in business."

"But once more, monsieur, I tell you I don't want your chain. It's brandy that I want," said Belatout.

"You are wrong, my dear fellow, it's a chance you'll never have again perhaps. Let me see how it will look on you," continued the indefatigable Abraham.

De Cracoville approached just as Belatout was in the act of repulsing M. Abraham, who was determined at all risks to force his chain upon the latter.

"My dear fellow," said Belatout, "pray come to my succor, monsieur absolutely insists that I buy his gold chain and I haven't the slightest desire for it."

"Come, Papa Abraham, be calm, when you're at all cheerful you have to try to sell something. You can sell your chain later on, when they're winning from you at baccarat. Gentlemen, here are some delicious liqueurs. Taste them. Later on they serve some kirsch punch of which you'll give me your opinion and which we can drink as freely as we please. Do you like kirsch punch, my dear Montabord?"

"Very much, but I've drunk so many things now!"

"All the more reason you should regale yourself on punch; it dissipates all the fumes of the wines."

"Then I shall partake of it freely — and the baron? is there no way of making him talk of a certain young man, you know whom?"

"The baron? he's just recommencing his story of the young girl he saved while floating on his back. He'll be at it for a long time yet. But the cards are waiting for us. Ah, here's the major, dealing for a game at lansquenet. Come, gentlemen, let's tempt fortune!"

Belatout allowed himself to be led to a card table. He rolled his eyes affrightedly about him on seeing that they were playing for gold, and muttered,—

"Can't one play for anything less than twenty sous?"

All the players shouted with laughter.

"Twenty sous," cried Spiterman, "twenty sous! do you take us for peasants, for snobs? The least is five francs, that is the minimum — then we'll pass to banknotes. Only, gentlemen, I warn you I won't accept fetiches, I let myself be caught several times and I've had enough of it."

"No, no; no fetiches!"

"And may I inquire what a fetiche is?" asked Belatout of his friend De Cracoville, as he sipped a glass of punch which the latter had passed to him.

"A fetiche is any trifle you please, a scrap of

paper, a key which they put down on the board and say, 'This represents ten louis — thirty louis,' anything one likes."

"And the one who wins gets nothing but a key?"

"It is understood that the possessor of the object must go the next day and redeem it by paying the value it represented. But some people forget to go and redeem their pledges."

"The baron is right — no fetiches," and Belatout, excited by the punch and the liqueurs, fumbled in his pocket and drew therefrom a handful of napoleons and placed his gold on the table, exclaiming,—

"Ah, messieurs — you think that I can't keep my head, but you'll see. I'll play what they wish. Wait, here are some yellow boys."

"Bravo! bravo! all honor to Montabord. He was joking just now with his twenty sous."

"Gentlemen, there are sixty francs to make!"

"I make them," cried Belatout.

"Very well, a king — two kings — you have lost."

"That's all the same to me, I make them again."

"There are a hundred and twenty francs there."

"I hold them. Give me some more punch, it is delicious."

"You have lost again — there are two hundred and forty francs."

"I make them again —"

"Decidedly, M. de Montabord is a fine player. You have lost."

"I make them."

"Pardon me, but I pass the hand."

"Ah, the major's afraid."

"Gentlemen, I am prudent, that is all."

"I take the hand," said Spiterman.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said the major, "but before we begin playing again I think it will be a good plan to settle our account with the restaurateur; here is the bill which the waiter has given me — the punch for the whole evening is comprised — the total is three hundred and twenty francs, with the waiter's tips. That will make, for eight of us, forty francs a head. Let each one pay his shot."

"That's right! Let's pay our shot."

"Baron, pay for me," said little Mirza, "I have no money."

"Abraham, pay for two," said the gentleman with the earrings; "we will settle later on."

"My dear fellow, it's your turn."

M. de Cracoville presented to Belatout the napkin into which each one threw his shot. Belatout could not understand why he must pay for a dinner to which he had been invited, and De Cracoville hastened to add,—

"It's a collection for damsels who are out of work."

"Oh, very well; that's all right now I know

it's a collection for young women, I'll give it with pleasure."

"We are contributing forty francs."

"I make them—I'll pay—no, I'll give them."

Belatout by this time did not know what he was saying; the punch, which he was drinking too freely, had made him completely tipsy. When M. Spiterman made his bank and said, "There are two hundred francs," Belatout wanted to make them, but he had lost all his gold; he then drew out his pocket-book, in which there was a bank note for a thousand francs, and placed the latter on the table, saying,—

"That is done."

He lost, then he lost double that amount, and at the last round nothing remained of his thousand francs. Then he seemed thunderstruck, stupefied by what he had done; he felt in his pockets, but he had neither gold nor bank notes left; he looked for his friend De Cracoville, but the latter was not there; he found no one to listen to him but M. Abraham, who said to him,—

"You had much better have bought my chain, then you wouldn't have lost everything. Wait a bit, if you like to give me your signature for three hundred francs, I have confidence in you and I'll give it to you."

Belatout, who now felt very unwell, pushed M. Abraham away without answering him and left the drawing-room where he felt stifled, to go and

get the air which was so necessary to him. He went down the staircase mechanically and found a waiter below who said to him,—

"Is monsieur looking for his carriage? it is here waiting."

"Yes — yes, the carriage; I think I had better go home."

Reeling out of the door, Belatout, with the help of the waiter, managed to get into the victoria which had brought him to the restaurant.

CHAPTER X

The Day After the Orgie

Unpleasant effects are apt to follow when a person who is quite tipsy and who has dined too well returns to his abode in a carriage, the rumbling of which increases his discomfort and his disorder.

M. Belatout, who felt decidedly ill, in vain called to his coachman to stop; the latter either did not hear him, or would not listen, and the result was deplorable and exactly what might have been expected.

When they arrived at the hotel and the coachman went to open the door of the carriage that he might assist his fare to alight, he at once perceived the damage which his victoria had sustained and shouted,—

"A pretty job this is, master, to spoil my orange silk cushions in this fashion. That'll cost you a pretty penny, I can tell you; the whole nine of them will have to be re-covered. I ought to have expected it when he got in — for he had to be carried bodily to it."

The shouts of the coachman brought the people of the hotel. They recognized Belatout and sent

some one to waken his valet, that he might come and take his master up to his apartments. As the coachman was still shouting for his money, the proprietor of the hotel told him he had nothing to fear on that score, and advised him to call again on the following day with a bill of what his guest owed for the damage done to the cushions.

Jacquet came in his night garments and a cotton nightcap. When he saw his master, whom they had seated in the vestibule, he cried,—

"What has happened to monsieur? he looks half dead."

"No; he is not half dead, but he is quite tipsy. Take him upstairs, some of us will help you, and make him take a cup of tea."

They managed to get M. Belatout to his room. Jacquet dropped scalding tears on his master's visage all the way up the staircase; then he called Friquette, who hastily dressed herself and came to see what was wanted of her.

"Our master's come home as drunk as a fiddler," said Jacquet; "he can't speak, he looks like a blockhead; they say he ought to take some tea, but I think he has taken enough of other things."

Friquette hastened to her master, who had been put to bed by one of the hotel servants. The little maid made the tea, Belatout drank it and after the second cup began to feel better and murmured,—

"Why, I'm in bed; well, I must have come in without knowing it."

"I should think you didn't know anything. Oh, monsieur, how tipsy you were. We had to carry you here."

"What is that you are saying, Jacquet?"

"Don't listen to him, monsieur, drink this cup of tea and then go to sleep; tomorrow you'll have quite got over it."

"You are right, Friquette. I feel that I should like to sleep."

Belatout drank the tea and dropped his head back on the pillow. Then Friquette departed, saying to Jacquet,—

"You will pass the night on a chair beside your master to be at hand if he requires anything."

"To be at hand! thank you; he has his bedside table with everything he needs on it — that ought to be enough."

"Jacquet, you will watch your master; remain there and don't stir from his side."

"Do you suppose that's very pleasant for me — I'm very sorry he brought me to Paris."

"Hold your tongue, and watch by your master."

Friquette went back to Diana, to whom she related what had taken place, and the young girl, rendered uneasy in regard to her father's health, wanted to get up to go and sit beside him, and Friquette had some little trouble in making her comprehend that sleep only was needed to restore M. Belatout to his ordinary condition. And the little maid softly rubbed her hands as she added,—

"Instead of your being sorry you ought to rejoice, mamzelle, for this adventure will help you in your love affair."

"And how can it do that? I don't understand you, Friquette."

"Don't you know that a person has no right to reproach any one for what he does himself?"

"But Marcelin doesn't get tipsy."

"Well, your father blames him for making your brother drink, for taking him to bachelor's dinners where they commit the worst follies. But monsieur can't say anything about that to him now. The vexatious part of it is that M. Marcelin does not know your brother's address and has not been able to meet him in Paris, but for which I should warn M. Eugène and let him know the state in which his father came back."

The next day, at nine o'clock in the morning, a gentleman presented himself at the hotel and asked to see M. Belatout, then he hastily added,—

"No, he's called Montabord in Paris, I had forgotten."

They showed this individual to Belatout's apartment, he entered the first room and there found Jacquet, who had been snoring all night and was not yet quite awake.

"Why, it's M. Grandbec!" said the servant, rubbing his eyes.

"Yes, Jacquet, it's me. M. Belatout is up, I suppose? Can I see him?"

"See him? oh, no; monsieur is sleeping like a top and I don't want to wake him."

"Is he still sleeping, he who usually gets up so early? He must have been up rather late last night."

"Late? I should say so. Just imagine, he came in after midnight rolling drunk — three of us had to carry him to bed."

"What are you saying, Jacquet? It's impossible, a steady, respectable man like M. Belatout."

"Yes, at Bar-le-Duc, but in Paris he's anything but that. Yes, he's running about all day. He dines every day in town. Wait! you can ask Friquette if it isn't so."

Friquette had assumed a very ingenuous expression on seeing Grandbec; she made a most beautiful curtsey to that gentleman.

"Good-day, little Friquette! I came to see M. Belatout, but Jacquet has been telling me things that I really cannot believe."

"What did he tell you, may I ask, monsieur?"

"That his master came home yesterday evening completely tipsy, that he could not stand."

"Oh, Jacquet, did you say that?"

"Well, isn't it true?"

"That's no reason why you should tell it to every one. When our master does foolish things we ought to keep it to ourselves."

"Oh, well, I tell what I see; so much the worse for him, he shouldn't have brought me to Paris.

Yes, monsieur came home dead drunk, and last night he woke me up to say to me, 'Jacquet — I had a thousand francs and I had besides at least four hundred francs. Can I have lost it all? or did I dream it? Look in my pockets.' Then I fumbled in monsieur's pockets and I found two macaroons, an olive, and a truffle; I showed them to him, and he threw himself back on his pillow, exclaiming, 'Fourteen hundred francs — lost, and a gold chain,' and then he went to sleep again."

"The deuce!" muttered Grandbec, "if that's the way M. Belatout watches over his son it will be necessary for some one to watch over him."

"Monsieur, don't listen to Jacquet; he's telling us his master's dream — that doesn't mean anything!"

"That wasn't a dream, because I looked in all monsieur's pockets; there was nothing left in them but two macaroons and an olive."

"Will you hold your tongue, you stupid chatterer! Are you going to lodge at this hotel, monsieur?"

"No, I'm lodging with a person who was recommended by my notary. As M. Belatout is still asleep I will come back at noon; I think he must be awake by then."

M. Grandbec departed, and Friquette hastened to Diana to tell her of the visitor they had had. For his part, Jacquet returned to his master, who soon awoke and said to him,—

"Jacquet, was I indisposed last night?"

"Indisposed! ha, ha! you mean you were so tipsy you couldn't stand up."

"Is it possible? I seem to remember now. Yes, I dined at the Champs-Élysées with Major Tourte and M. de Cracoville."

"They put you in a fine state."

"In the evening — I played cards —"

"And you lost fourteen hundred francs."

"Do you think, Jacquet, I lost as much as that?"

"Hang it, it was you who told me so this very night."

"Why, I must have lost my senses."

"Mercy, when one's tipsy doesn't one always lose one's senses?"

"Does my daughter know all this?"

"I haven't seen mademoiselle; but Friquette saw you when they brought you here, it was she who made you the tea."

M. Belatout frowned; he rose, dressed himself, feeling as seedy as one ordinarily does on the day after a debauch. He went to find his daughter, who ran to kiss him, saying to him,—

"You don't feel ill now, father?"

"No, my darling; I no doubt ate something at dinner which disagreed with me and made me ill."

"You enjoyed yourself, I suppose?"

"Not so much as I had hoped to."

"Are you going to dine with M. de Cracoville again today?"

"No, I shall stay with you—I'm going to breakfast with you. I shall take nothing but tea, that will restore me altogether."

"And my brother, have you had news of him?"

"No, this gentleman who knows him does not know his address. I begin to despair of ever—"

"M. Grandbec came to see you, but as you were asleep he said he would come back at noon."

"Grandbec is in Paris? So much the better, he will help me to find my son."

Belatout passed the morning with his daughter. On the stroke of noon Grandbec presented himself and bowed to Belatout with a rather sly expression.

"Good-day, M. Belatout. You are awake at last?"

"What do you mean by being awake? can't you see well enough?"

"I mean to say — has your rest done you good? Have you recovered from your indisposition of last night?"

"And who told you I was ill yesterday? Can't one sleep a little late without being ill?"

"No doubt, but I was only speaking according to what your servant said to me — that — yesterday evening you were a little or rather a good deal—"

"A good deal what?"

"Well, pretty far gone in your cups."

"My servant is an ass — I'm astonished that

you should put any faith in his rigmaroles. Since he's been in Paris the fellow is turned upside down. But what is this noise I hear?"

Jacquet came into the room saying,—

"Monsieur, there's a man here who insists on being paid what you owe him, and he says he won't go away without his money."

"What does he mean? I owe nobody anything."

"Wait a bit, monsieur, settle with him yourself; here he is, he's followed me."

It was the driver of the victoria, who came in on Jacquet's heels shouting,—

"I don't intend to be made to dance attendance on anybody. I haven't time to come back. Here, monsieur, is the bill you owe me."

"Why, you are mistaken, my good fellow, I don't even know you—"

"You don't know me—well, I know you only too well, so I do! I brought you here last night from a restaurant near the Arc d'Triomphe, and I came to look you up."

"Didn't M. de Cracoville pay you?"

"Nobody paid me—here's your bill."

Belatout examined the bill, of which the total came to a hundred and twenty-five francs.

"A hundred and twenty-five francs," exclaimed Belatout, "for two trips in a carriage. You're making game of me, I think!"

"Monsieur forgets the damage he did to my carriage, there's twenty-five francs for a day's hire

and a hundred for the spoiled cushions of my victoria, and it isn't a bit too much, for you did a good job while you were about it; you had a fine jag on, if I may say so."

Belatout turned the color of a beetroot, he fumbled in his pocket and hastened to pay the coachman and send him away. While he was doing so Jacquet shouted with laughter and M. Grandbec even did not refrain from giggling, as he said,—

"So you had a jag on? I know what that means."

To vent some of his ill-humor Belatout gave Jacquet a well-applied and vigorous kick, and said to him,—

"There! take that, to teach you to laugh in my face!"

Jacquet went off shouting,—

"It isn't my fault, is it, that you spoiled the carriage cushions and were carried home rolling drunk! Another time I won't sit up with you, for you make me sick."

Happily Jacquet had got to a distance or he might have received another booted compliment. Belatout endeavored to resume a cheerful expression, and said,—

"Yes, I was quite unwell — I had been dining with some men of the very upper crust. They mixed the wines too much, and when one is not used to it — but enough of that. Well, here you are in Paris, Grandbec. When did you arrive?"

"Yesterday only."

"You will help me to find my son, whose address I cannot find out?"

"I shall hardly have time to help you in your search, I came here to follow up a matter that is in litigation; my notary gave me instructions to see the advocates every day, to attend the Palais de Justice, and to write to him every evening an account of what I have done during the day. I shall have no leisure to amuse myself. All the same, here is my address, which I'll leave you so that if you have anything important to tell me you can write me a line and I'll come running."

"Thank you a thousand times."

M. Grandbec tried to enter into conversation with Diana, but the latter only answered him by syllables, and he soon took leave of the Belatout family. Hardly had this gentleman gone when they came to tell Belatout that M. de Cracoville was waiting in the public drawing-room. Our provincial assumed a severe expression and went to the drawing-room.

"I am curious," said he to himself, "to know how this gentleman can explain to me his conduct of last night."

When De Cracoville saw Belatout he came towards him with hand outstretched, crying,—

"Why, my dear fellow, what is this I hear, you were indisposed last night when you came in? The heat must have made you ill. How I regret

that I was not there when you left—I should have accompanied you."

"In fact, monsieur, I believed, I thought I was to come back with you, but I looked for you in vain."

"Hang it, because I myself felt unwell, very unwell. I was obliged to go out to get a little air; I felt very faint indeed."

"Explain to me how it came about that I had to pay my share at a dinner to which the major invited me?"

"Ah, that was my fault. I was mistaken, I had misunderstood; it was a picnic, but one of those picnics where no one is admitted without an invitation. You found everything delicious? and what wines! hey? for you know what good wines are."

"They had too many wines, that was what overcame me. I played like a madman. Do you know, monsieur, that I lost fourteen hundred francs at your devil of a picnic?"

"That doesn't astonish me in the least, I lost quite two thousand francs."

"You lost two thousand francs?"

"That's what I have just had the honor of telling you. That devil of a Spiterman won it all, he has insolent good fortune. But, pshaw, we'll take our revenge; at play luck comes and goes, to-day one loses, tomorrow one wins."

"Oh, thank you, I have no desire to begin again."

"Every one says that; but one has to do something. Everybody gambles here; the men do it at the bourse, at cards, in business, young men gamble with their health, in fact, even the soldiers gamble with their lives, and politicians gamble with everybody."

"That is possible; but at Bar-le-Duc I was just as much amused in playing for ten sous as I am here in playing for ten louis; it was even more amusing to me."

"Very good! but you are not at Bar-le-Duc, and one must conform to the usages of the town that one lives in. Will you come out and take a turn?"

"Thank you, I am going to stay with my daughter."

De Cracoville understood by this that he must leave the country gentleman to get over his emotions of the evening before; he left him, saying,—

"I will leave you in the bosom of your family, I am going to continue my search for this little Belatout in whom you are interested, and if I learn anything I'll hasten to inform you."

"This confounded fellow manages so that one cannot remain out of humor with him," said Belatout to himself when De Cracoville had gone. "All the same, I shan't go to any more of his picnics, those gentlemen play too high by far, and that German baron who knows my son is not at all pleasant; he speaks only of his success with the

ladies. I think of the two I prefer the gentleman who insisted on selling me a gold chain."

Belatout took his daughter for a walk on the boulevards. Friquette followed behind and telegraphed to Marcelin, who upon this occasion was unable to approach Diana and had to be contented to admire her from afar.

Just as they were going into their hotel the father and daughter found themselves face to face with M. Plantureau; both parties stopped.

"Why, it's Plantureau!"

"Ah, Belatout, and mademoiselle, delighted to meet you! You've just arrived in Paris?"

"Oh, we've been here for more than a fortnight. Well, Plantureau, have you succeeded? Is your new invention for railways adopted?"

"Hum! not yet! I've got the grapnels, I've had them made of all sizes. I have a room full of them, but the difficulty is to get them accepted; one company has said to me, 'Monsieur, before we can judge of your invention it's necessary that you should launch your grapnels yourself.'"

"Well, why don't you launch them?"

"Thanks. You're very kind. One must be very strong and well practised in gymnastics to throw those things. I wanted to try and throw one of them into the yard at home, and as I live on the first floor, it seemed nothing could go easier; I just missed throwing myself out of the window and gave myself lumbago."

"Then your invention is refused."

"Not at all! I'm now looking for a mechanical device on which my grapnels can be placed in such a manner that on pressing a spring they will drop down on the road of themselves and stop the train."

"Good luck to you! As for me, I'm looking for my son here and I haven't yet been able to get the slightest information in regard to him. I don't know where he lives nor where he goes."

"My wife is more fortunate than you are, she has seen your son — she even went to a show with him."

"Can it be possible? What is this you tell me? Your wife knows where Eugène lives?"

"I don't say she knows where he lives, that is not even probable; don't you go to imagining that my wife has been to his apartments. That's rather strong, that is."

"Then what is it you tell me about your wife and my son? Explain yourself."

"Some days ago Eulalie said to me, 'I just met M. Eugène Belatout; he asked me to give you his best compliments and offered to take me to the play because he had a ticket I said to him, "I don't know whether my husband will let me go to the play without him; come to our place in the morning and I'll give you an answer."' I couldn't go to the show, I had lumbago. If it had been to go to a—light theatre, I should have hesitated—but it was to the Odéon, I saw nothing to prevent it

and I consented. Your son came and called for my wife, took her to the play and brought her back in the evening in a cab, because it rained, and that's all; I haven't seen him since."

"But your wife must have had time to talk to him; it's probable that she knows what he is doing. She may be able to give me some information. To-morrow morning I'll go to your house and question your wife — that is, if it won't put you out?"

"And why do you think it should put me out? Here's my address — we shall expect you tomorrow. You can try one of my grapnels — you're very strong, I'm sure you could throw them easily."

"Thanks, I won't try to. Well, I'll see you tomorrow, Plantureau."

"Good-day, mademoiselle, I'm glad to see you so well."

CHAPTER XI

The Beautiful Ethelwina

Shortly after he had breakfasted on the following day, Belatout went to call on his friend Plantureau, who was living in a very modest hotel in the Marais. He found the inventor plunged deep in calculations concerning his invention and Madame Plantureau was engaged at her toilet. On learning from Belatout's lips that her husband had reported to their friend the fact that she had been to the theatre with his prodigal son, that lady compressed her lips, elevated her nose and exclaimed in an exceedingly acid tone,—

"Good heavens! what a gossip of a husband I've got! May I ask, M. Plantureau, why you should think it necessary to go and tell everything I do?"

"Madame, it was because he saw nothing out of the way and did not imagine that you would want to make a secret of that incident," suggested Belatout, pacifically.

"Secret! of course not, monsieur, there's no secret about it," answered the lady. "But it is no less ridiculous to go and talk to his friends about his wife's slightest actions.

"Ridiculous it is if you say so, madame, but I shall be very much obliged to you if you'll tell me what you know of my son. What is he doing in Paris? what is he living on? where does he dwell?"

"Come now, monsieur, do you imagine for a moment that I put such questions as those to your son? He took me to the theatre, was extremely pleasant to me, treated me to some bonbons and some oranges, then he brought me home; that is all, monsieur, I know nothing further."

"But you must have talked between the acts, madame."

"Yes, monsieur, we spoke of the rain, of the fine weather, of the actors and of the play."

"He didn't mention me to you?"

"Not a single time."

"Nor say what he expected to do in Paris?"

"No, he said nothing of that either."

"And were you to see him again soon?"

"Do you suppose I made an appointment with him! Really, M Belatout, you put questions to me that are almost as absurd as my husband's inventions. I should like you to see his grapnels, which take up a whole room for which we have to pay rent, and tell me what you think of them. He'll bring me to poverty with his inventions. What a misfortune that I should have married an inventor."

Belatout could obtain no further details in regard to his son, and as Madame Plantureau seemed hurt

at his insistence in questioning her on the subject he beat a retreat, for he was unwilling to listen to Plantureau, who wanted to show him his grapnels.

When he got back to his hotel he went into the common drawing-room, saying to himself,—

"M. de Cracoville may perhaps have learned something. He took me to a dinner where I lost my senses and my money — that's true; I shall go to no more of Major Tourte's picnics. That, however, is no reason why I should break with M. de Cracoville, who knows the whole of Paris and cannot fail to help me to find my son soon. I know already that the rascal's behaving well, since he takes ladies to the theatre, but I must know more than that."

Instead of De Cracoville, M. Belatout found Madame de Vanilley in the drawing-room in her favorite pose on the sofa so as to show off her arm, her foot, and, shall we confess it, her ankle.

Belatout, who was less constrained in his manners than in the early days of his stay in Paris, bowed to the lady and entered into conversation with her.

"You have returned from the country, I perceive, madame."

"Yes, monsieur, yesterday evening."

"Did you enjoy yourself there?"

"No, not much. People go to the country in summer because they think they will get fresh air, balmy odors. But no, not at all; the sun there

is a hundred times hotter, the grass is scorched, and in the walks where you seek a little shade you are more apt to get a sunstroke — then the flies, the insects which sting you! Then if you sit down on the grass in the evening your nostrils are assailed by anything but sweet odors, and when you come in you are covered with gnats which sting you so that you pass the night in torment. These are some of the delights one finds in the country."

"That is true, madame; to enjoy the country one must be used to it."

"That is not all; if one wants fine fruits there are none to be had, they have all been sent to Paris by the railroad. Some milk—it is the same thing, all sent to Paris. Everything there is of the best and finest, all the early fruits and vegetables are for Paris. You see, monsieur, it is better to be in Paris, since you can at least find all you desire there. I stayed at a château—a very fine château; it has a superb garden, a park, a piece of water and no end of rooms. To reach the one given me I had to cross a whole suite of others. Well, it was not at all cheerful; I was afraid in the evening in that immense château, we were, however, three ladies and several gentlemen, to say nothing of the servants, but a hundred persons would be necessary to give life to that immense place. Oh, monsieur, you don't know how delighted I was to find myself back in Paris. Really, the country isn't half so pretty as the ballets at l'Opéra."

This conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a lady, who ran to kiss Madame de Vanilley and appeared delighted to see her.

Belatout was greatly struck by the appearance of this lady, who was most elegantly and tastefully dressed. She was a woman of twenty-eight, big, well-made, of fine figure, a blonde, with blue eyes and pink cheeks; she had magnificent hair, which was arranged so as to set off its thickness and color, a charming smile on a small mouth often allowed one to see two rows of admirably white and pearly teeth; in fact, she was a very fine woman, and perhaps the most agreeable thing about her was that she looked as though she might be a good fellow!

"Why, is this really you, my dear Ethelwina?" said Madame Vanilley, half rising to receive her friend. "How nice of you to come and see me."

"Thank God! you've returned at last from your wretched country. I have been so lonely without you. So this morning as soon as I learned through De Cracoville that you had come back I hurried here to kiss my good Zuléma."

"Thank you, a thousand times, my dear! But come, let us go to my rooms, for I ought not to receive you here."

"And why should you not? we are very comfortable here, that is, if we do not disturb this gentleman with whom you were talking as I came in, and who perhaps has a grudge against me for interrupting your conversation."

These words were accompanied by a charming smile and fascinating glances which often rested on the fine diamond pin that Belatout wore in the knot of his cravat; but as the pin was very near his face, our provincial might well be deceived there and take to himself the oglings which were cast at the big diamond.

Belatout bowed and stammered,—

"Madame, you must not think that your presence — assuredly I was talking with Madame de Vanilley — however, it is I who fear to be indiscreet in remaining here, and I am going — "

"Oh, monsieur, if you go I shall think it is I who am driving you away and I shall be quite vexed at you."

"Since that is so, madame, I will remain. I should be very unfortunate to displease you."

"That is right. Come and sit near us and we'll all three chat together. Zuléma, you will present me to monsieur — English fashion; one knows at once with whom one is talking."

"Still as mad as ever, dear Ethelwina."

"Madame's name is Ethelwina?"

"Yes, monsieur; do you know me?

"M. de Cracoville has spoken to me of you."

"Oh, M. de Cracoville has spoken to you of me? and what has he told you? all sorts of horrible things, has he not?"

"Ah, madame, you know well that of you there is nothing but good to be said."

"That's very gallant — almost too gallant. Take care, monsieur! I believe all they've told me. Do you live in this hotel?"

"Yes, madame."

"Alone?"

"No, with my daughter."

"Did you come to settle in Paris?"

"I don't think so — I am in search of a young man, and when I shall have found him —"

"You will take your departure. But we can't let you do that — you must stay with us."

"But I have property at Bar-le-Duc."

"The country of those delicious jams! you must send me some of them."

"With great pleasure, madame."

"You think me rather unceremonious, don't you? but I detest ceremony. I say leave that to people who have nothing else to think of. You are acquainted with De Cracoville, then?"

"Yes, madame; that gentleman has been very obliging to me, he has condescended several times to serve as my guide in Paris, for I know very little of it, having been here only once before and that twenty-five years ago."

"You must have found everything changed, By the way, will you tell me your name, please?"

"Montabord, at your service, madame."

"Well, M. de Montabord, you must get more thoroughly familiar with Paris; we will try to render it agreeable to you."

"That is already accomplished, since I have met you here madame."

"You are very ready, monsieur. All the ladies will be setting their caps at you. Beware! I am capable of putting myself in their ranks."

"Ah, madame—"

Belatout was thoroughly delighted; he had never found himself in a like situation; the beautiful Ethelwina realized for him all that his imagination had dwelt on as being the most attractive, and this seductive woman, as remarkable for her charms as for her toilet, gave him her sweetest glances and treated him as if he were quite an old acquaintance. This was quite sufficient to turn the head of a man of fifty who had never sown any wild oats and who consequently was not on his guard.

"By the way, my dear Zuléma, you are aware that I am going to give a party, a ball, a rout—we are going to make a night of it, in fact."

"Why, I thought you had had your party!"

"The idea! when you were away! do you suppose I could have a successful party without you?"

"You are too kind! and when are you going to have this party?"

"I haven't fixed the day yet, but it will be at an early date; it depends upon the baron, Spiterman has always so many engagements. Do you know Baron Spiterman, M. de Montabord?"

"I had the pleasure of dining with the gentleman at an informal dinner three days ago, madame."

"Oh, yes, I heard of that dinner. How did you like the baron?"

"Why, madame, I thought—I thought—he's a very handsome man."

"I didn't mean physical appearance, but his temper, his disposition. He's very stupid, isn't he?"

"Frankly, madame, I should not permit myself to say as much as that."

"But you must have thought it. I'll wager that Spiterman talked during the whole dinner time of his success with the ladies—of the women who had adored him. In the first place, I don't think there's anything more foolish than a man who boasts of his conquests; when he has known how to please a woman and she has reciprocated his attachment—discretion is the first duty of a man, and does not secrecy add a charm to any love affair?"

These words were accompanied by very expressive looks at Belatout's pin; that individual was much moved by them and conceived it his duty to closely compress his lips and keep a finger on them. The fair Ethelwina resumed,—

"But Spiterman thinks that all the women should yield to him and be faithful to him—that is the comical thing about him. But he's a man I am obliged to manage because he is interested in my future, though that doesn't prevent me from often finding him unsupportable. Then it is agreed that you come to my party."

"Can you doubt it?"

"And you will bring M. de Montabord, who I hope will not refuse my invitation."

"Really, you overwhelm me, madame, I am greatly flattered!"

"It is agreed then? I shall expect you?"

"Assuredly. It is a ball?"

"A ball, a concert, we shall have a little of everything."

"May I bring my daughter to it?"

Ethelwina smiled, glanced at her friend and answered,—

"Well, I don't know why you shouldn't; I should be delighted to have her. Only I ought to warn you that there will be some character dances—among them some Spanish ones in which the poses are a little risky, and that would perhaps shock the modesty of a young lady who is not accustomed to going to our theatres."

"You are right, that would shock my daughter's modesty, especially as she is very shy. It is much better that I should not bring her."

"Just this once it would perhaps be wiser. But I had forgotten that I have a thousand things to do, I must go to my dressmaker, my staymaker, my jeweller. Oh, M. Montabord, you are wearing a very fine pin."

"Do you think so, madame?"

"It is a superb diamond."

"Yes, it is a fairly good one."

"It flashes so as to dazzle one. But what a gossip I am and time is passing. Good-by, Zuléma. I shall see you again presently. M. de Montabord, I hope to meet you again soon."

"I shall await the moment impatiently, my dear madame."

The fair dame left the drawing-room accompanied by her friend, who went down with her to the carriage which was waiting below. As Beldtout went upstairs to his room he encountered Friquette, who was always prowling about the staircases.

"That's a pretty woman, if you like," she exclaimed, "a very pretty woman, and what a toilet, what elegance!"

"Oh, you saw the lady who has just left the drawing-room?"

"Yes, monsieur, she came downstairs with another who did not shine beside her, and I heard her say, 'Good heavens, what an agreeable man that M. Montabord is, I am charmed to have made his acquaintance.'"

"Really, Friquette? did she say that?"

"Yes, monsieur; yes, at first I didn't think she was speaking of you, for I forgot you were called Montabord here. But she resumed, 'I want him to come to my house; do you hear, my dear? you must bring him, I wish it.' It seemed that she was set on it."

"Did she say that?"

"Yes, monsieur, and something else beside, but as she spoke low I did not hear what it was."

Belatout was in the third heaven. He went into his room and looked in the glass, then he called one of the hotel servants and inquired about a hairdresser, for he was now aware that his long hair was not according to the fashion; he had not noticed how thin it was though, and that if he should have it cut he would be almost bald. A hairdresser came; Belatout confided his head to him, and the artist in hair assured him that he would make him a parting. While he was thus striving to rejuvenate himself, M. de Cracoville sent to ask if he might come in.

"Yes, yes, let him come in. He follows the fashion, he will tell me if my hair is done according to the mode."

De Cracoville, who had met Madame Ethelwina, approached Belatout smiling.

"Well, my dear fellow! was I mistaken in praising Madame Ethelwina," said he, pressing Belatout's hand.

"No, you were almost too sparing in your praises; she is ravishing, adorable, fit to break one's heart, and how excessively amiable!"

"I am delighted that you think so, for do you know what she said to me about you?"

"She mentioned me to you?"

"Just now, in fact."

"You met her then?"

"Yes, at her jeweller's, where she is purchasing some fine pearls."

"And she spoke to you about me?"

"I should think so! she spoke of nothing but you. Deuce take it, my dear fellow! you have fortune at your feet, you've made an immediate conquest of one of the prettiest and most run-after women in Paris."

"This lady is run after?"

"I mean that all the men are mad about her. It is who can do most to please her, some of our most fashionable men among them, when crack! here come you from the provinces and outdo the Parisians! I call that luck indeed!"

"Permit me to say, however, that since she is M. Spiterman's mistress —"

"Why, my good fellow, that doesn't count. A woman must always have some one behind her to pay her staymaker and her dressmaker. But he is never the one she loves."

"Do you mean to say he is never the one? then it is much better to give her nothing."

"Except those thousand and one trifles that are beauty's toys."

"And what said this lady to you, about me?"

"She said to me, 'I've just made the acquaintance of a gentleman who lives at your hotel, M. de Montabord. He's a charming man of the very best class. I think him a hundred times preferable to all these Parisian dandies.'"

"Did she really say that?"

"She added, 'He's as witty as possible, his conversation charmed me, and so I invited him to come to the party I am going to give.' You see your affairs are in a good way. By Jove! I am rather mortified that you should succeed so easily when I have failed, but that Spiterman is such a fatuous fellow that I should be delighted to see her throw him aside for you."

"What! you think I could cut him out?"

"As soon as you like. I have no doubt of it!"

"If I thought that — how do you like my hair this way?"

"Very well; you look twenty-five."

"I have been twenty-five."

"You are still only that. Shall we dine together?"

"By Jove, yes; while doing so, we can talk about the fair Ethelwina."

Belatout went to the Palais-Royal to dine with De Cracoville; and during the repast the latter talked of nothing but Spiterman's beautiful mistress and persuaded Belatout that she had a passion for him. Our provincial took everything that was said to him literally; and he now thought of nothing but the fair Ethelwina. However, when he came back in the evening he saw that Friquette was bursting with laughter whenever she looked at him. He paused in front of the little maid.

"What makes you laugh?"

"Oh, master, your hair looks so funny done that way, You've hardly any hair left."

"That's because it is curled."

"Oh, yes, and prettily curled above the ears."

"Does it make me look bad?"

"It changes you altogether. You look like a choir boy."

"Then it must make me look young."

For several days Belatout went to the drawing-room as soon as he had breakfasted, and did not stir therefrom for fear of missing the elegant Ethelwina's visit. At length on the third day she came, and as Madame de Vanilley had not yet come down, Belatout found himself alone with the Baron de Spiterman's fair friend. She pretended to be overcome with emotion when she saw him, and said in a voice which seemed very tremulous,—

"Ah, here you are, M. de Montabord! how pleased I am to have met you. Have you thought of me a little?"

"Have I thought of you, madame? I have done nothing else."

"And I. Good heavens, how singular are these feelings to which one cannot but submit, for they are stronger than one's self, one feels drawn as by a magnetic current. Never have I experienced for any human being what I feel at the sight of you!"

"What, madame, can it be—"

"Oh, I am mad, I say things that a lady ought to hide—but my feeling impels me."

"Oh, say it! say it again — don't put a check on yourself."

"No, we can talk together at my house, my party is on Saturday; you will be sure to come?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"You must escort Zuléma; she is my faithful friend, I can trust you to her."

"I shall esteem it an honor to accompany her?"

"And then it will seem as if she brought you, presented you at my house. I am obliged to act thus because of my German — you understand?"

"Yes; pretty well."

"I'll go up to Zuléma's to forewarn her. So it is settled. In any case here is my address. If Madame de Vanilley cannot come, you must come alone, saying that she sent you."

"I will come on my head rather than miss the chance of being with you."

"What nice things you say. Au revoir. You may kiss my hand."

"Ah, madame!"

"Enough, enough, that goes to my heart. Until Saturday, my dear friend."

"Until Saturday, incomparable woman!"

CHAPTER XII

Before the Ball

His thoughts intent only on the beautiful woman whose conquest he imagined he had accomplished, Belatout, when his daughter said to him, "Papa, have you news of my brother?" seemed to start from a dream as he answered,—

"News of your brother? By Jove, no, my dear. I don't know where the fellow can have buried himself, but I don't meet him anywhere. For that matter, there's no immediate hurry, we have plenty of time, and I am sure to run up against him sooner or later."

"Are we going to stay here in Paris then?" asked Diana.

"We shall stay here—until I find your brother."

"And that'll be a long time first," muttered Friquette to herself, "for one might as well set Jacquet to look for him, he would probably be quite as successful as master."

Belatout took care to impart to De Cracoville the fact that he had received an invitation for the following Saturday and to ask him how he must dress to appear at the party given by the descendant from a Scotch clan.

"Your clothes are all right," said De Cracoville, "put on a coat instead of a sack, that is all. The rest is always quite correct; besides the fair Ethelwina told you that she did not like ceremony."

"For all that, at a party I don't hold with making myself a blot on the picture. You told me she received all Paris."

"Yes, all Paris that likes to amuse itself, to laugh, to have a spree."

"What do you mean by a spree?"

"I mean make charges, parades, put the whole room upside down, to play active charades or improvised scenes. That's much in fashion now at parties, they play comedies, and sometimes they improvise."

"The deuce! I've never played in a comedy, I shall be very awkward. No matter, I am going to have a pair of tight black cassimere trousers made, they always look well. You are going to this party?"

"Am I going, by jingo! as the Marquis de Molière would say, 'I should like to see the party given by one of our fashionable beauties at which I was not present.'"

"And the major?"

"The major will be there also, all those who were at the picnic will be there."

"All? the man with the gold chain too?"

"Abraham? Yes, certainly, the ladies are very fond of him because he often gives them presents

of bracelets, earrings, pins. You know, my dear fellow, women have a weakness for jewelry, for anything that shines, that takes their eye."

"Will they have cards at this party?"

"Naturally! Ethelwina would not ask a man to her rout who did not play."

"I shan't do so, however; I have no desire to lose as I did at your picnic."

"You are wrong; one loses one day and wins another; fortune is capricious. You'll do as you please, of course, and I suspect how you'll pass the time, you gay deceiver — you will pay court to the fair Ethelwina."

"You say Ethelwina without a prefix, isn't that rather curt?"

"My dear Montabord, it is with these women who are the fashion as with all celebrities, artists, authors of renown. One treats them familiarly because one wishes them to do as much to one's self."

Following what De Cracoville had said to him, Belatout, to go with his tight-fitting trousers, had a velvet waistcoat sprigged with jet made and bought himself an opera hat. He went to Madame Vanilley's to ask her what time he should call for her.

"At eleven o'clock," said that lady.

"Eleven o'clock! good heavens, how late," exclaimed Belatout. "Why, the evening will be nearly over."

"You are mistaken, my dear monsieur; a party hardly begins till midnight; if we go at eleven we shall be the first; remember, we shall be there all night."

"Then, madame, I shall come for you at eleven o'clock precisely."

Saturday came. Belatout would willingly have begun to make his toilet at noon, but contented himself with sending for his hairdresser again, although Jacquet assured him that if he were curled again he would be quite bald.

After the hairdresser came the tailor. Belatout wished to try on his trousers, although the man assured him it was unnecessary, that he was certain they would fit his customer perfectly; the latter insisted and tried to put on his trousers, but could not get into them.

"You see I was right to try them on!" cried he; and the artist in clothing answered,—

"Why, no, it was needless, they will fit you very well."

"Why I can't get into them!"

"If you could slip into them easily they would not be tight trousers."

"But if I can't get into them what use will they be to me?"

"Wait a bit, monsieur, we'll see how they'll do."

The tailor thrust his arm into the trouser leg to give it more play. Then they tried them again; with Jacquet's help, who pulled one leg while the

tailor pulled the other, they managed to induct Belatout into his trousers.

"You see they go on all right, monsieur."

"Yes, but not without some trouble; ouf, they pinch me terribly everywhere."

"Necessarily, they are what are called tight-fitting trousers."

"Say now, master, I've got an idea, I have."

"And what is that, Jacquet?"

"Why taking them off will be no easy matter, it'll need some pulling."

"If monsieur will take my advice he will keep them on all day, in that way the trousers will yield to his figure and won't bother him at all in the evening," said the tailor.

"You are right, I will keep them on."

"So much the better, master, for we shan't have the trouble of putting them on again."

Belatout paid the tailor and sent him away; he tried to walk about the room, but he could hardly move; then he admired himself in the glass.

"What do you think of me?" he said to Jacquet. "Thank heaven, I am well-made and they'll be able to see that."

"They'll see too much, it's indecent, so it is; you look as if you had nothing on but some English blacking."

"I'm in the fashion, and I think I shall have some success at the party to which I am going this evening."

Friquette was stifled with laughter when she saw her master in his new costume. Diana said to her father,—

"Where are you going, papa, that you've made yourself so fine?"

"I am going to a ball given by a queen of fashion, my dear."

"And you're not going to take me and I'm so fond of dancing?"

"No, my dear, because they'll have character dances at this ball which you know nothing about, and consequently you could not dance them and you would not be amused. But don't fret, if I think these dances graceful tomorrow you shall have a master to teach them to you."

"Are you going to dance, master, that you're got up so stylishly?" inquired Friquette.

"No, I shall content myself with looking on. I am only wearing the evening dress that is usual in Paris; one must dress in the fashion wherever one goes."

"It's that little hat that's so funny! Why don't you put it on your head, master?"

"It is not meant to be worn on the head, but to be carried under the arm."

"Then you don't cover your head with it?"

"Never. Ah! Friquette, fix my pin in the knot of my cravat so that it will hold firm."

"Your big diamond! Oh, be easy as to that, master, I'm going to fasten it so that it can't come

out. It would be very unfortunate if you should have it stolen from you."

"Stolen from my neck? that would be rather difficult!"

"Mercy! the thieves in Paris are so skilful."

Belatout had begun to dress himself completely at seven o'clock; at a quarter of eight he was ready, but he had to wait till eleven o'clock before he could go for Madame de Vanilley; the time was long in passing, for when one is dressed one is always impatient to be off; sometimes one gets sleepy and has much ado not to fall asleep; sometimes one is inclined to go to bed and let the ball go to the devil, and I have known persons who were unable to resist that inclination. Belatout had no desire to go to bed, but he cursed the fashion which required that no one should go to a ball till late. He walked up and down the room trying to make his nether garments a little more easy, for they had not even a crease; sometimes he tried to skip, but he could hardly manage that. However, Friquette encouraged him.

"Why, how light you are on your feet, master," said she, "I never saw you dance like that at Bar-le-Duc!"

"She is right, father," said Diana in her turn, "why did you never dance down there when we went to a ball? I know a ball was a rare event, but we did go sometimes."

"My darling, there's an old proverb which says

'opportunity makes the thief,' and I begin to think that it's true. In our neighborhood when I went to a ball they sat me down to a card table with the grandparents, although I'm not yet so old that I can't hold my place at a ball, even if it only be to make a fourth in a quadrille."

"Oh, you would make a fifth very well, master, without putting yourself out."

"I begin to see that they are a little behind the times down there. Diana, do you know how to dance the polka?"

"Why, of course, papa."

"Give me a short lesson, then; it seems they dance it a good deal here. De Cracoville said to me, 'If you can polka you'll be a valuable acquisition.'"

"Willingly, papa."

"Friquette, you hum a polka for us."

"Yes, monsieur, I know plenty of them, for I dance it well myself and I wanted to teach Jacquet; but he is so stupid that there's no way of making him dance in time."

Diana hastened to teach her father to dance the polka; he had some trouble in beginning but soon got into the step and then he liked it. Friquette hummed a polka and beat time by tapping on the fire shovel with the tongs. The more Belatout danced the faster he went; but Diana, who was easily tired, soon declared she could do no more.

"What a confounded pity, we were doing so

well," cried Belatout, "I should be able to dance it with the best of them."

"If monsieur would like to keep on, I am strong and can dance for a long time," said Friquette.

"Really, Friquette; faith, I should like to try it, and that will accustom me to a change of partner — but if you dance who is to sing?"

"No trouble about that, master, I can sing and polka too, oh, I can do several things at the same time."

And Friquette, putting down the shovel and tongs, came and took her master by the waist and began to polka with him; the little maid danced very well, she had a correct ear and if her partner broke the step she knew how to set him right immediately. Belatout was electrified, he became a zephyr, he would not stop and Friquette sang at the top of her voice as they circled around. At this moment the door opened and M. Grandbec appeared, followed by Jacquet.

The dry, yellow young man stopped at the entrance to the drawing-room, surprised by the scene that met his sight, while Jacquet exclaimed,—

"Ah, that's a good one! master's dancing with Friquette! was that why he put on those trousers that pinched him?"

But Belatout once launched would not stop; he continued to polka, trying to look as graceful as possible. Friquette continued to sing, and jumped

as high as her master, and to stop them Jacquet had to pull the latter by the tail of his coat.

"Stop, master, a-done, now!"

"Will you leave me alone, you idiot, take yourself out of this."

"But here's some one come to see you — M. Grandbec — here he is."

At the name of Grandbec, M. Belatout, however, stopped. He wiped his face, for he was in a perspiration, then, all out of breath, he went to receive his visitor, who was regarding him with supreme astonishment.

"Good evening, my dear Grandbec. Ouf! I'm a little warm. Friquette, go and take a little rest, you must need it."

"Me, master? why I'm all ready to begin again if you like."

"No, not at this moment. And is the world going well with you, my dear Grandbec?"

"Yes, monsieur, as well as it can be expected for any one who works hard all day, for I have no time to dance — which doesn't seem to be the case here."

"Oh, I was about to tell you; I'm going to a ball this evening, or rather tonight, for they get there very late, at the house of a queen of fashion, and, by Jove, as I don't play cards now, I was practising for the dance — I am a little rusty."

"Oh, you are going to a ball? With mademoiselle, of course?"

"No, my daughter does not accompany me. It is a ball where they perform character dances of the Spanish kind, she does not know them."

"And was it a character dance you were performing just now with your servant?"

"Not exactly. That was a polka, in case they should be short of partners. Confound it, my hair is disarranged."

M. Belatout left Grandbec to go and adjust his hair at a mirror, and while he was doing so the gentleman with the bird's beak approached Diana and in a would-be confidential voice murmured,—

"Your father leaves you here while he goes to a ball — why, the world's upside down. It's putting the cart before the horse, the dessert before the soup, it's the tail before the head, it's —"

Diana interrupted Grandbec by saying to him dryly,—

"Monsieur, I think that my father is perfectly right to amuse himself."

"Then, mademoiselle, that is different. Let it be as though I had said nothing."

"Willingly, monsieur."

Belatout came back to Grandbec.

"The dance rather upset me, but I've partly repaired the damage. How do you like my waistcoat? It's gaudy, isn't it?"

"You dazzle me. Do men wear jet now?"

"Men wear everything."

"And your son, do you know what he is doing

in Paris? For it occurs to me that was the object of your journey."

Belatout was rather embarrassed and muttered,—

"No, I have looked for him well, but I don't know where he is hidden. However, he is in Paris, for he took Madame Plantureau to the theatre."

"Then if you know that, you have the clue in your own hand — and through that lady you ought to find —"

"That's where you are mistaken. Madame Plantureau did not ask Eugène where he lived. In fact, why should she have asked him, hey? it would have seemed odd had she done so. Deuce take it! here's one of my braces broken and Friquette's not here. Diana, call your maid that she may sew on this buckle that's come off. Confound it, had my brace broken at Madame Ethelwina's I should have been in a bad fix."

"You have two — the other would have held you together."

"It might; but if everything depended on it most likely it would break also, then you can imagine what would happen! I dare not think of it."

"It's almost ten o'clock, I suppose you are going to start?"

"Not so soon; I'm escorting a lady who lives in this hotel and she told me she wouldn't be ready until eleven o'clock."

"At that hour I hope to be sleeping soundly.

Good-evening, M. Belatout; I hope you'll enjoy your ball. Mademoiselle, I present my respects to you."

"I am not sorry he's gone," said Belatout when Grandbec had taken his leave. "He put on such a look of astonishment when he saw I had jet on my waistcoat."

"Do you want to begin the polka again, monsieur?" inquired Friquette.

"No, it's very nice, but it will put my hair out of curl too much. Besides, now I am easy on that point, I know how to polka. A quarter past ten. How slowly time goes sometimes. Diana, if you want to go to bed, my dear, don't let me keep you up."

"Thank you, papa, I'm not in a hurry to go, I'm pleased to keep you company. M. Marcelin dances the polka beautifully."

"What, Diana, are you still thinking of that young man?"

"Oh, yes, papa, all day long I think of him."

"Sometimes mademoiselle dreams of him!"

"Hold your tongue, Friquette! when these young girls get anything into their heads they are so stubborn. My trousers are all right, they don't bother me now at all. Why, it is only half-past ten. Jacquet! Jacquet! Where is he now, the idiot? He's never here when one wants him."

The great simpleton came, yawning and stretching his arms.

"Don't you want me to undress you, monsieur, to go to bed?"

"You stupid, you! do you suppose I dressed myself so carefully to go to bed?"

"Mercy! since you've danced with Friquette I supposed that would be sufficient."

"Go up to Madame la Baroness de Vanilley — tell her that I am ready and at her service if she wishes to start. It is nearly eleven o'clock, go!"

Jacquet did his errand and M. Belatout began to put on his gloves. Presently Jacquet came back saying,—

"You've lots of time, master, there's no hurry. The lady called out to me, 'I haven't even got my hair done.' It's not time yet."

"She hasn't got her hair done yet? That's frightful! what time shall we get there? Well, the only thing to do is to wait. Really, my gloves fit perfectly, it took me a long time to put them on. I should like to get to this party before daybreak, though I'll wager that Madame Ethelwina will think we get there too late. How ridiculous it is to begin an evening when one should be ending it. All the same I am perfectly gloved."

"Eleven o'clock is striking, master."

"Do you think so, Friquette?"

"Listen if you don't believe me."

"It's so, that's eleven o'clock. Madame Vanilley must be ready by this time. Jacquet, go up and ask that lady if she wishes to start."

Jacquet, who was in a bad temper because he could not go to bed, grumblingly went where he was sent and returned saying,—

"The lady wants to know if monsieur is on fire. She begs him not to torment her thus."

"This is too much, that woman will make me die of impatience, not to be ready yet, and what does she think I'm doing while awaiting her?"

"Master, will you have the polka again?"

"No, Friquette, I have my gloves on and my hair in order — that would spoil my toilet. I should have done much better to go to this party with M. de Cracoville and Major Tourte. But it was that lovely Ethelwina who asked me to squire her friend, and it seems impossible for a woman to be promptly ready at the hour agreed on."

Ten minutes passed; but then Belatout could contain himself no longer; he angrily slapped his opera hat on his head and ran up to the baroness' apartment, exclaiming,—

"So much the worse, it must be ended. I'd rather carry her in my arms than wait any longer. I'm going to look for your mistress," said he to Madame de Vanilley's waiting-maid. "It's impossible that she isn't ready by now — it is more than a quarter past eleven."

"Why, monsieur, madame is putting on her shoes."

"What, she's putting on her shoes, she hasn't got them on yet?"

"Why, you see madame always gets her shoes too small. She has such a pretty foot."

"If the shoes are too small she'll never get them on."

"Oh, yes, in time she will; we've got the left one on, but it's the right one we can't manage."

"Who is there, Flore?"

"M. de Montabord came for you, madame."

"Let him come in — perhaps he can get my shoe on. Come in, my dear neighbor."

"Here I am, madame, at your service. I thought we were going to start."

"Yes, as soon as I've got my shoe on. Look, what charming shoes, but this one won't go on."

And Madame de Vanilley, who was extended on a sofa, lifted her leg to show a very small foot from which hung a white satin slipper which could not have shamed Cinderella, and in the abandon with which she exhibited her foot she disclosed a cloud of laces also, but Belatout was too intent in thinking of the fair Ethelwina and too impatient to get to her house to notice anything; he put his knee to the ground and seizing the ankle she extended to him, said,—

"I'll put it on for you, madame, confound it, it will have to go on."

"My dear neighbor, you'll greatly oblige me. But gently, don't go too roughly, I can't bear the least pain."

"You have to bear a little to get that on."

"Ow! you're hurting me dreadfully."

"There it is, madame, it is on; put your foot on the ground."

"It really is on! you are a charming man!"

"Well, if you can walk with those shoes on it will astonish me very much."

"Excuse me, that is all right, the foot has settled into it."

"And now we can start, can we not, fair lady?"

"Yes, I'll put my gloves on in the carriage. Is it below?"

"Yes, and has been for a long time."

"Then we'll go. Oh, good heavens, I was going to forget my bouquet. Where have you put it?"

"What bouquet, madame?"

"Why, the one you were to have brought me. You know very well that a lady does not go to a ball without a bouquet in her hand."

"A bouquet? by Jove, I must confess that I don't know what you mean."

"Why, M. de Montabord, what an oversight! To go to a ball without a bouquet, what will they think of you, and of me?"

"Do you think any one will pay any attention to that?"

"I tell you again, monsieur, I can't go without a bouquet. That would be odious."

"But what can be done about it?—it is so late."

"Don't be alarmed about that, in this neighborhood one can always get them. Tell Alexander, the head waiter of the hotel, to go and get one, he'll do it."

Belatout, who felt like weeping, went in search of the waiter who started off and presently came back with a ravishing bouquet which only cost ten francs. Madame de Vanilley was satisfied, and gave her hand to Belatout, saying,—

"Let us go."

The latter heaved a deep sigh and cleared his throat as he said,—

"Ten minutes to twelve, it's time."

CHAPTER XIII

A Ball at a Cocotte's. A Tempting Pin

The fair Ethelwina occupied a delightful little hotel in the Chaussée-d'Antin. Baron Spiterman, who was generous to a degree, had rented it furnished, and had lavishly adorned it with all those pretty trifles which are necessary to a woman of Ethelwina's kind and which are not despised, either, by ladies of the highest degree.

In the middle of the inevitable court in front of this hotel was a basin of water, in which great white swans glided gracefully about; and this being a rarity gave distinctive value to the mansion, for in Paris shrubbery and lawns are a great deal more common than pieces of ornamental water; tubs of shrubs and orange trees, magnolias, daturas, and other fragrant flowers surrounded the basin, so that on entering the hotel grounds one inhaled a fresh, balmy odor which is also very rare in a great city like Paris.

On festival occasions, Ethelwina had the house lit only with Venetian lanterns, which threw a soft, mysterious light. This lady was past mistress of the art of flattering the senses and satisfying the eye. She had, in contradistinction to

many fashionable beauties, taste and imagination. If she ruined her lovers, at least she did them honor; she lavished their gold to satisfy her desires, her fancies, but she did not squander it foolishly like so many others. Her toilets were always remarkably elegant and she invested them with an individual charm. All this was irresistible to one who had eyes and a heart—I say, and a heart, because there are a good many people who have none left.

When they had alighted from the carriage, Belatout was obliged to support Madame de Vanilley, who could hardly stand on her feet and took five minutes to go up to the first floor, where the company was gathered. The countryman, who was dying with impatience to see the queen of the fête, looked about for some one to whom he could yield his baroness. At length they reached the drawing-rooms and the fair Ethelwina came to receive them. This lady wore a costume which recalled those of the ancient Athenians, and on her head had a kind of diadem glittering with precious stones. Her beautiful light silky hair was drawn back from her forehead and confined in a beautiful coil. Belatout was dazzled, he wanted to say something complimentary, but he could only stammer,—

"It was madame's shoes which detained us."

This made the beautiful woman smile.

"The greater part of my guests," said she, "have not yet arrived. But it was kind of you to come early. Come, M. de Montabord, give me

your arm that I may take you to visit my apartments. Zuléma has enjoyed your society long enough, it is time she yielded you to me."

"I don't know whether the lady has enjoyed herself with me," said Belatout; "but I know well that I have not experienced the slightest pleasure in being with her."

He hastened to offer his arm, very proud of the honor conferred upon him and smiled at De Cracoville, who in passing whispered to him,—

"Fortunate mortal! with what impatience were you expected!"

"What did that giddy fellow say to you?" demanded Ethelwina, smiling at De Cracoville.

"Nothing, fair lady—something very flattering if I dared to believe it."

"Always believe everything, my dear monsieur; in this world, you know, only credulous people are happy. How do you like my drawing-rooms?"

"They are superb! magnificent! oriental!"

"Have you visited the Orient?"

"No, but I have read the 'Thousand and One Nights,' which has given me some idea of it. What is this delightful little room, so dimly lighted by these alabaster globes which I see through the opening of the doorway? Are we not going in there!"

"No, no! that is my boudoir—my favorite retreat when I receive a visitor of whom I am fond."

"Pray, let us go in then—"

"My wolf does not wish that I should receive any other man there, but I make light of his orders."

"Your wolf? have you got a wolf?"

"Don't you understand what I mean by that? I was speaking of my jealous German. He hasn't come yet, and I am profiting by his absence in talking thus with you. Oh, you have on your beautiful pin! Good heavens, what a fine diamond, and how well it is set."

"Yes, I have often been complimented on it. Let's go for a little into your secret bower."

"Well, for a moment only; for the baron will soon be here; I am rather surprised that he isn't here by now. Come — for I do not know how to refuse you anything, you fascinating man!"

These words were accompanied by a gentle pressure of the arm. Belatout was radiant, but just as he was lifting the damask portière which half closed the entrance to this sanctuary of love, several young women came running up and surrounding Ethelwina said,—

"Dearest, tell Grignet to sing something for us; something funny, comical, he knows so many of those songs."

"Tell him yourselves."

"He won't listen to us. He tells us that he knows nothing but indecencies, and he's afraid he'll make you angry if he sings them."

"Ha, ha, ha! how silly he is. Does he think we are prudes? Does no one dare to laugh in my

house? I'll go and speak to Grignet. Ladies, I confide M. de Montabord to you—he's a charming man who has come to Paris in search of a little amusement, and who is going to send us some jams from Bar-le-Duc."

Ethelwina left Belatout, who found himself surrounded with young women, nearly all of them pretty, who smiled at him most amiably.

"So, monsieur is going to send us some jams from Bar? I just love them."

"I could eat six pots for my dessert."

"Is monsieur from that country?"

"Yes, ladies, I've just come from there."

"He's just come from there, he looks like it," whispered a saucy-faced girl to another. "Oh, dear, what a head, what a get-up!"

"He looks like a jumping-jack."

"But look at that pin in the front of his cravat."

"It's superb; it affords a pretty relief to his physiognomy."

"I should like that much better than jam."

"Why, they are singing. Grignet is singing, come ladies. Do you like music, monsieur?"

"I'm not fond of the piano, but singing always pleases me."

"You are right not to like the piano. There is nothing which puts one to sleep so quickly as these long difficult pieces which last for two hours, during which the player breaks five or six strings by the force with which he taps on the notes!"

These ladies had, however, left Belatout to go and listen to the singing. Our provincial walked about the rooms and gazed at the company, which every moment became more numerous. There were more men than women; but the latter were nearly all pretty and rivalled each other in elegance and in smiles; they seemed quite disposed to enjoy themselves, for one kept hearing shouts of laughter. The men were in general well-dressed and well-mannered, except a few common-looking ones, among whom we must class M. Abraham, who came with his enormous gold chain, and the Hungarian, who wore rings in his ears and on his fingers.

De Cracoville and the major came up to Belatout, and the latter said to him,—

"We are going to have a game of baccarat in the blue drawing-room, will you make one of us?"

"No, I'll not join you; thanks, but I don't wish to play again."

"You don't wish to play again? What the deuce are you going to do from now until supper?"

"Why,—chat with these ladies and dance, for I think they are going to dance, aren't they?"

"Oh, you still dance. That is different."

The major went off to settle himself at his cards.

"You still dance! Why did he say 'still,'" said Belatout, "I think that 'still' was very much out of place, but the major thinks of nothing but play. I would much rather pay court to the ladies,

it doesn't cost so much, am I not right, M. de Cracoville?"

"I am not at all of your opinion," answered the dandy, "ladies often prove very costly, I ought to know something about it, they've cost me more than a million."

"A million!"

"I put it at the lowest computation. However, I don't regret it; I have enjoyed life and I think money is of no use but to spend. Oh, here are some more people coming. This time it is my lord protector."

"Whom do you designate by that title?"

"By Jove, whom should I mean but Spiterman, the avowed lover of the fair Ethelwina, with his little favorite, the young painter Mirza."

In fact, the handsome Spiterman advanced into the room, casting glances around him which were rather haughty than amiable, deigning to smile at the ladies and sometimes at men, but always with that proud, conceited expression, which seemed to say,—

"You must know that I am almost master here, that all the beautiful things collected here are the fruits of my munificence, and that if she gives you a party it is I who pay for it."

In the baron's position a man of any wit would have been careful not to act thus; he would have tried to pass in the crowd of admirers without being noticed. But men are sometimes devoid of

mind and the greater number are carried away by vanity.

Spiterman looked around for Ethelwina, who had not come running fast enough to meet him; instead of her he saw Belatout and seemed hardly flattered at meeting him at his mistress's. He looked at him without bowing and instead of smiling at him made a grimace.

The provincial, who was about to bow to this gentleman, paused.

"What is the matter with this German?" he said to himself. "Can he know that I have won his sweetheart? Faith, I should be delighted to deal him a slap in the face, for he was very unpleasant to me on the occasion of the picnic — and he was hardly civil when I asked him about Eugène."

Spiterman, who had reached Ethelwina, said to her, pointing to Belatout,—

"Why did you invite that here?"

"Whom do you mean by 'that,' my dear?"

"Deuce take it, that man who's so badly dressed, who carries himself so awkwardly and puts pins in his cravat, which isn't done now."

"When the pin is as fine as his, my dearest, it is always well placed and never looks ugly."

"I recognize the lout; he was at a picnic with us at the Champs-Élysées. He was as drunk as a fiddler — and seemed quite put out because he lost a few louis. But I must confess I did not expect to find him here; who brought him?"

"It was dear Zuléma, whose friend — lover he is."

"Your dear Zuléma's friends are always the men who displease me."

"It's just by chance that happens."

"Chance! hum, when these chances come so often it becomes suspicious. Be careful, Ethelwina — remember our conditions. I refuse you nothing that could be agreeable to you, such as dress and jewelry; but I don't wish you to talk intimately with any man."

"How stupid you are with your conditions. If it pleases me to forget what is due to myself, my ducky, I shall not ask your permission. But you must be out of your mind to be jealous of this provincial, who hardly dares to turn round here."

"You are right, to be sure; it was stupid on my part."

"Ethelwina! Ethelwina, do let us have some dancing; tell your orchestra to begin, our feet are tingling for the music."

"Yes, ladies, you are right, we must dance. Come, gentlemen, invite your ladies. I declare that the cancan is permitted."

"Really, I'm glad of it. Besides, they dance it now in the best society."

"And the English assert that it is our national dance."

"At any rate, it is more graceful than their jig."

An orchestra composed of two violins, a 'cello,

a cornet and a piano began the introduction to a quadrille. In a moment, nearly all the ladies were in their places with their squires. Madame de Vanilley was obliged to be a wallflower, because she could not stand up for any length of time. Belatout, who dared not venture a quadrille, placed himself in the first row to watch the dancers; and soon he was glad that he had not offered himself as a partner, for these ladies danced in a manner that seemed to him very peculiar, such steps and postures, such high kicking he had never seen, but all gracefully done and accompanied by such piquant, aggravating, seductive little faces. Saint Anthony himself would hardly have been able to resist the she demons if they had danced the can-can like these ladies of the demi-monde.

"Well, what do you say to that, my dearest monsieur?" demanded the Jew, Abraham, who came up to Belatout and took him by the arm familiarly. "Are there not some little women here who skip about in a pretty fashion?"

"Oh, good-evening, monsieur, I am quite of your opinion. Yes, indeed, these ladies execute a dance in a manner that is truly astonishing. I am quite bewildered."

"You are not used to going to the Casino then, they never dance otherwise there."

"At the Casino — no, I haven't yet been to that ball. By the way, I think the men are more circumspect than the ladies, they use no risky steps."

"Oh, not yet, they are only beginning and don't want to tire themselves, but you'll see them after supper, they will jump like clowns — why, there's little Mirza beginning already. Look!"

In fact, the young painter had just made a mad leap which won him a thousand bravos and the applause of all the dancers. However, Belatout was longing to see Ethelwina dance; but the queen of the fête was still occupied in receiving her guests and had not taken part in the first quadrille; she was so surrounded and obliged to answer her many admirers that she could no longer talk with Belatout; but when she passed by him she always managed to glance at him and smile and whisper one of those words which make the heart beat and which women know so well how to say.

After the quadrille they played a polka. Belatout thought that he might venture, for this dance permits of nothing but the ordinary steps. He looked around for Ethelwina, for it was she with whom he wanted to polka. At length he perceived her in a group of women who seemed to be laughing a good deal as they listened to her; and he heard the mistress of the house say to her friends,—

"I bet you that tomorrow it will be mine. Hortense, will you bet your little blue shawl against my red?"

"Oh, no, you are too lucky at betting, you will win — you can have it, but at least you will leave us some jam, won't you, ha, ha, ha!"

Ethelwina saw Belatout — she made a sign; everybody was silent.

"Were you looking for me, my dear monsieur?"

"Yes, my dear lady, they are going to polka; will you do me the honor to dance with me?"

"I should be delighted to do so, but I cannot; my tyrant has forbidden me to polka or waltz with anyone but himself. Make this dear Zuléma dance, she is doing nothing."

"It would be quite impossible to make her do anything; that lady is shod in such a fashion that she can't even walk."

"That's just like her. Tell me, ladies, which of you is free? Astasie, your Arthur doesn't polka, it seems to me?"

"No, he thinks it a stupid dance; he says the men look as though they were trying to throw their partners to the ground."

"Will you dance with M. de Montabord?"

"Yes, if he is strong. Can you dance well?"

"My dear lady, I think I can manage it."

"You think! well, if you can't dance I warn you I shall leave you at once."

"M. de Montabord, you are going to dance with one of the best dancers in Paris."

Belatout bowed; the threat that this lady had made to leave him if he did not dance well seemed to him rather unamiable; but the orchestra began to play, he put his arm round his lady's waist, she was a strongly built brunette, and began by step-

ping on her toes, when that lady uttered an oath worthy of a ragpicker; but to repair his awkwardness, Belatout hastened to whirl her round and then reverse, a step which Friquette had taught him and thanks to which he obtained his partner's pardon, for she exclaimed,—

"Why, that isn't at all bad. You turn very lightly for a man who comes from Bar-le-Duc. Not bad at all. My dear monsieur, you have a very handsome pin."

"Do you think so, madame?"

"Yes, reverse again, I like that. Yes, your pin takes my fancy. Will you make an exchange?"

"Of what, madame?"

"Give me your pin and I will give you my heart. Well, you don't answer, and you are turning too fast now."

But Belatout was launched, he had profited by Friquette's lessons; he was in a perspiration, but his conceit forbade him to rest. Happily the orchestra stopped; his partner went and threw herself upon a sofa exclaiming to him,—

"Well, you haven't answered me, you are a naughty flirt."

Belatout was greatly flattered at being called a flirt, he hurriedly swallowed a glass of punch; he had danced well and was pleased with himself; what was more, his partner had offered him her heart; he had no further doubt but that he could please the ladies; in truth, the latter had made

this offer conditional to his giving her his pin; but he thought that was her clever way of making a declaration.

Syrups, ices, punch, champagne frappé circulated abundantly, and nobody refused it; the ladies set the example of imbibing champagne with a promptitude which would have won the approbation of a juggler; already the drawing-rooms had taken on a different appearance; to a propriety almost regular had succeeded an abandon, a lack of restraint, a conviviality which, like a train of powder, communicated from one to another and made gayety and folly reign everywhere.

On all sides they talked, they laughed; the giddy women said everything that came into their heads and in this flow of repartee a great many witty things were said. Many people only acquire a reputation for wit by means of the boldness of their language and their habit of speaking at cross purposes; it is like the predictions of a fortune-teller — people carry very little of it away with them.

De Cracoville had tried several times to lead Belatout to play cards; but the latter had resisted, he wanted to stay with the ladies; besides, Ethelwina in passing near him had said,—

"After supper I hope — he will go to his card-playing, and we can have a little private chat."

And Belatout, electrified by all he saw around him, by that atmosphere of pleasure which he

breathed and also, perhaps, by the champagne frappé which he frequently drank in order to gain as much abandon as the rest of the company, said to himself,—

"We shall chat privately, oh, heavens, what pleasurable anticipation that word private awakens in me. I have never felt younger than I do to-night. I know I wasn't so young twenty years ago."

"You are aware, my dear monsieur, that I hold my chain at your orders," said M. Abraham hooking his arm into Belatout's. "There's more than one pretty woman here who would make many sacrifices to possess it — but I have no use for it there, I have renounced the fair sex — but you, who still dance like a zephyr — you ought to court the little women — am I not right, my joker? ha! ha! ha!"

"Why, M. Abraham, I don't say but what — should opportunity present itself — "

"Opportunity! that's good, that is. One has no need of opportunity here, these affairs settle themselves by mutual consent. Why don't you take a little glass of Moet? it is excellent."

"Yes, the champagne is perfect — "

"Then you will buy my chain to offer to one of these ladies, that's understood. I shall keep it for you; I shall be asked for it, but I will keep it for you."

"Why, no, no, don't do that."

And M. Belatout, to escape M. Abraham, went and seated himself beside Madame de Vanilley, who was still waiting till her foot would allow her to walk; she welcomed the provincial with a sweet smile and said to him,—

"Come and talk a little with me. Is not this a delightful party?"

"Yes, madame; there's a conviviality, a go here of which I had not the slightest conception."

"And the company is so well chosen."

"I confess that the ladies' toilets and appearance are ravishing; what is more, they are exceedingly pleasant."

"And the men, you don't speak of them! why they are some of the best in Paris, stockbrokers, bankers, very rich foreigners, all men who have large financial interests, the very pink of fashion and pleasure. By the way, how did you get on with her?"

"With whom?"

"Goodness! with Ethelwina. Do you suppose I don't know she has taken a liking to you? you ungrateful thing."

"A liking? what do you mean? I don't understand you!"

"You needn't make a secret of it with me. I am Ethelwina's intimate friend, she confides in me —you please her."

"Do you really think I have the good fortune to do so?"

"I am sure of it, be gallant and you will be successful. Oh, she thinks your pin is uncommonly handsome; in your place I should offer it to her."

"My pin? do you think that she would accept it?"

"Try her and see. If she does accept it, Ethelwina has too much delicacy to prove ungrateful. You understand me?"

"I think I do. But they are going to polka. I like that dance and I shall invite a lady to be my partner."

Belatout had by no means decided to offer his pin, and he left the lady of the little feet, to put an end to the conversation.

Dancing continued in one drawing-room, cards were being played in another, everybody was very busy and the conversations were lively and animated, when some one came to say that supper was ready. Then everybody turned towards the dining-room, the players even leaving their cards.

"We'll resume the game after supper," said they.

The supper-room was dazzling to the sight; the table was laden with lights, with brilliant centrepieces, and rich vases were filled with rare flowers. The most delicate dishes, the most delicious wines, announced a feast worthy of Laïs or Asphasia. There was a place for everybody, for the table was immense and a movable partition had been taken away to make room for it. The hostess appeared

on Baron Spiterman's arm and he seated himself beside her. Every one else sat where he pleased, preferably near the lady to whom he was paying court. Belatout, who almost stepped on Ethelwina's gown, came just in time to seat himself on her left, which made the baron, who was on her right, frown.

The supper was necessarily as cheerful as the ball; it became so thoroughly noisy and the glasses were filled and emptied so often that soon one could distinguish nothing; people talked, laughed, sang all at the same time; nobody listened, but everybody applauded. In the midst of this general uproar the fair Ethelwina did not hesitate to tap her left neighbor with her knee; he responded energetically with his right leg and accompanied this hidden play with tender glances at his neighbor. But the good Spiterman surprised one of these glances and said to his mistress,—

"Why has this intruder, this numbskull, this caricature, placed himself beside you?"

"Why, because he was put there, my darling."

"He should not have been put there. If he's Zuléma's lover he should be beside her."

"That isn't reasonable. Are all these gentlemen beside their ladies? It is well to change a little."

"He's casting sheep's eyes at you, this clown."

"Why, everybody's casting them; that's what they come here for."

"He whispers to you quite often too."

"Because he's so timid he dare not speak out loud."

"What were you saying to this gentleman?"

"He was asking me if it is true that Zuléma is only twenty-five."

"It's a falsehood, that isn't what he was saying to you."

"Ha, ha, ha! Poor M. de Montabord, are you doing him the honor to be jealous of him?"

"Possibly; but he must not look at you too much or I shall have to correct him for it."

"Spiterman, my Othello, you have a bee in your bonnet, dearest!"

"That's right — laugh at everything. But remember, there is one point upon which I do not laugh."

The supper was prolonged out of all reason, then suddenly the ladies cried,—

"What about the cotillon? we haven't danced the cotillon. Come, quick! quick!"

"Who is going to lead it?"

"Let Mirza, he leads so well. Come, let's dance. Begin, Mirza."

"Ladies, I am still hungry."

"That's impossible."

"I swear to you I am."

"Oh, well, you can go back to the table afterwards."

"I'm thirsty still."

"No, no, you can hardly stand now. Begin the cotillon quick! that will set you up."

The ladies almost dragged little Mirza by force; the players returned to their cards; everybody rose, and Ethelwina whispered in Belatout's ear,—

"Now is the time — in my boudoir; go there and wait for me."

Then she went off with Spiterman, who did not dance the cotillon and went into the card room. Belatout remained a few moments longer at the table; he swallowed some green Chartreuse to give him courage, then went into the ballroom to look for a moment at the cotillon and finally passing through a little drawing-room and holding aside the portière, which he recognized, he entered this charming boudoir which the vulgar herd were prohibited from entering.

He seated himself on a sofa and waited.

"She is dancing the cotillon, but she's sure to have seen me come here. Besides, since it was she herself who suggested meeting me here, she will know when to leave the dance. I am much agitated — my head is on fire, my heart is beating fast — this woman disturbs my mind. I still hear the music. Can't she leave the cotillon?"

But the portière was lifted and Ethelwina appeared, breathless from dancing; she threw herself on a sofa, exclaiming,—

"Here I am — I thought I should never get away. Poor dear, were you very impatient?"

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"Oh, you are a charming man, kneel down at my feet."

PHOTOGRAVURE FROM ORIGINAL DRAWING BY LOUIS MEYNELL.

"Why, fair lady, my thoughts were so occupied with you, that,—

"How nice you are! do you really love me?"

"Good heavens — you have driven me wild."

"Well, then, perhaps — you may find your love reciprocated; only I do not trust men's words — I must have proofs — I must have something as a pledge of your vows."

"By Jove, anything you like, my darling; if a lock of my hair would please you, cut it off."

"Ha, ha! how silly you are. No, my dear, I do not wish for a lock of your hair. I don't like hair, it is dirty. But wait, your pin is very attractive to me, give it to me. I will make an appointment with you — do you understand?"

"My pin, you would like my pin?"

"Why, yes, do you hesitate? it's a caprice, an oddity on my part, but if you refuse, it must be that you don't love me!"

"No, I hesitate no longer, I value the pin, but take it; it is yours."

"Oh, you are a charming man, kneel down at my feet that I may take it from you."

"Here am I, at your orders, fair lady."

"Let's see, then,— come nearer. Oh, confound it! how it is twisted. I can't get it out."

"It was Friquette who put it in, and she secured it very carefully."

"She secured it too carefully, did your Friquette. But I'll have it yet —"

But at this instant the portière was thrust rudely aside and the Baron Spiterman appeared at the entrance to the boudoir; when he saw Belatout at the feet of Ethelwina, who had one arm around his neck and seemed to be about to kiss him, the German uttered a formidable oath and advancing towards Belatout he knocked him over so that he rolled five feet away from Ethelwina, who also swore, but under her breath.

"Confound it all!" said she, "just as I was going to get it."

"So it was to make love to madame that you came here, M. de Montabord?" cried Spiterman, going up to Belatout, who had picked himself up and was rubbing his side.

"Monsieur, you pushed me very brutally, I think such an action was extremely impolite."

"Oh, you think my manners impolite, do you? and why were you kneeling at madame's feet after I had forbidden her to receive any strangers in her boudoir?"

"Monsieur, for that matter I am not in your house, but in madame's, that has nothing to do with you."

"Nothing to do with me; I'll soon let you see if it is nothing to me! for I'm going to kick you out of the house immediately."

"Kick me out! Madame, do you permit your guests to be insulted thus?"

But Ethelwina, who was in a very bad temper

because she did not succeed in detaching the pin, did not answer Belatout.

"Look here, my friend, no scene, you know I don't like them; if I was talking with monsieur it was only for fun."

"And you had your arm round his neck for fun —that won't go down with me, you flirt. And you clown, get out of here, or I'll kick you."

"What do you say? Is it me you are calling a clown? you are an impertinent fellow."

"I shall apply my boot to a certain part of your anatomy if you don't depart very quickly."

"You make me tired — I don't know you."

"Will you get out?"

"You be blowed! leave me alone."

"You be blowed! you said that to me, I believe. You won't go, won't you?"

The baron, running up to Belatout slapped him in the face with his glove. This insult made the provincial jump and he sent his fist into Spiterman's face. The latter, furious, was about to throw himself on his adversary; but they surrounded him and stopped him, for this scene attracted a part of the company into the boudoir.

De Cracoville and the major pierced through the crowd; the former addressed the baron.

"Why, what is the matter here? What, fisticuffs between gentlemen?"

"This man has struck me!"

"It was you who began!"

"Come, baron, calm yourself."

"No, no, in his blood I will wash out the insult he has given me. I must have his life and I will have it!"

"What is he talking about? have my life—not if I know it."

"M. Montabord, you will send your seconds to me tomorrow at noon; there they will find mine. Don't fail to send them, for if you don't I will break my cane on your face every time I meet you."

"Really? and do you think the sergeants of the town will allow you to do that?"

But De Cracoville and the major took Belatout under the arms and led him away, while the young men and the dancers surrounded the baron and made him go back into the ball-room.

Belatout, quite beside himself at what had happened to him, went back to his hotel with De Cracoville and the major, who said to him,—

"Be easy—we'll settle the affair; we'll go tomorrow to that devilish Spiterman, we will be your seconds."

"Gentlemen, you understand, I haven't the slightest desire to fight. This German shouts and raves and won't let anyone speak—he threw his glove in my face, and I responded with a blow from my fist—it seems to me that is enough. Don't you agree with me?"

"Don't be at all uneasy about it, we'll charge ourselves with settling this affair."

"Why, this is extremely kind on your part, and I shall be very grateful to you. Then tomorrow you will come and tell me how it is ended."

"Yes, tomorrow, when we leave the baron's we'll come straight to you."

"Not before noon, will you? for it is now five o'clock in the morning, and we had better get a little sleep."

"Certainly, you will see us towards one o'clock."

"In the common drawing-room, gentlemen; for, as you can understand, I don't want my daughter to hear of this affair."

"That's quite right; we will keep your secret."

"Thank you, gentlemen. Good-by till tomorrow."

CHAPTER XIV

The Eve of the Duel

A sleepless night followed for Belatout. The scene of the evening before had greatly diminished his passion for the fair but frail Ethelwina; he thought, not unreasonably, that that lady might have better defended him from the anger of her jealous friend; when the gentleman had ordered him to leave in so unceremonious a fashion, it seemed to him she ought to have shown that she was the mistress of her own house, and that she alone had the right to command there. The truth underlying all this was that Belatout was mortally afraid, and fear, as we all know, is always mightily injurious to love.

To reassure himself he kept soliloquizing, "De Cracoville and the major faithfully promised me to get the matter settled; therefore, I need have no further uneasiness on that score."

In spite of these endeavors to reassure himself as to the outcome of the affair, however, he was very pale, very shaky when he arose and went to breakfast with his daughter.

"Did you enjoy yourself at this ball, father?" asked Diana, while Friquette sought to divine from

her master's countenance what had caused him to seem so uneasy and so pale.

"Yes, my dear child, yes; I enjoyed myself immensely."

"You danced a good many polkas, monsieur, of course, for you look very tired."

"Yes, I did; and I dare to think that I did so successfully. Friquette, you fastened my pin in very well indeed, my thanks are due to you that I did not lose it."

"Mercy, monsieur, such a beautiful pin as that, it would be a great pity if you should lose it, that was why I twisted it a little when I put it in."

"You are not eating anything, papa."

"I'm not hungry."

"You are not ill, are you? You look very pale."

"I'm very well."

"All the same," said Friquette to herself, "there is something the matter with him — but I shall find out what it is."

Belatout kept looking at his watch, and as it struck one Jacquet appeared.

"The two gentlemen who live in the hotel," said he, "Major Tourte and M. de Cracoville, are in the public drawing-room; they told me to come and tell my master that his witnesses were here."

"Your witnesses? what do they mean by that, father?"

"Nothing, my dear; only last night they wit-

nessed my agility in dancing the polka. Jacquet, tell those gentlemen I will be with them almost immediately."

Belatout was much agitated, he rose, saying to his daughter, "I shall be back very soon," and anxiously hastened to the drawing-room, where he found the major and De Cracoville. He advanced toward them.

"Good-day, gentlemen; I was impatiently expecting you. Well, have you seen this jealous baron, who carries matters with so high a hand?"

"Yes, indeed, we come from him —we found his seconds there. The affair is all settled," answered De Cracoville.

"Thank you! thank you! my dear fellows; you were extremely kind to undertake to settle it. Thank you a thousand times. I was not at all disturbed about it, nevertheless, I am glad to feel it is all ended and done with," said Belatout.

"Done with!" exclaimed the major in astonishment, "why you can't call it done with till after the combat."

"What? do you mean to tell me — What did you say, major? I don't understand you!"

"I said that the matter will not be done with till after the duel has taken place."

"The duel? What are you talking to me about a duel for? You came to tell me the matter was settled, and now you are talking about a duel. I think such jokes are very ill-timed."

"We are not joking," said De Cracoville in his turn; "it is you who misunderstand; we told you that the affair was settled, which means that all the preliminaries have been settled by the witnesses; the time, the place, the weapons; you fight with swords, tomorrow morning at eight o'clock, in the Bois-de-Boulogne."

"But, deuce take it! I don't want to fight. What have you done? Is that how you settle matters? Did I not say yesterday that I had not the slightest desire to fight?"

"We have done the best we could. We too had hoped that it could be ended without the flash of steel; but there is no way out of it. The baron told his seconds very positively, 'Accept no settlement, no apologies, the combat absolutely must take place.'"

"But once more, if I don't want to keep the appointment, they can't carry me there, I suppose?"

"No, but you will be looked upon as a coward, and this Spiterman has sworn that he will kick you in a very humiliating manner whenever he meets you. As we were quite sure you would not bear such an insult as that, we've regulated the conditions of the combat."

Belatout threw himself into an easy chair and tore his hair as he exclaimed,—

"A duel—what mix myself up in a duel? I, who have such a horror of them? Why, it is

impossible! In the first place, I don't know how to draw a sword."

"If you prefer the pistol, that might be managed — but it is more dangerous."

"No, no, not pistols."

"Would you like rifles better, such as the Americans use?"

"Why no, neither pistol, nor rifle, nor sword. I want them to leave me alone, I don't want to fight."

"My dear friend," said De Cracoville, "you cannot do otherwise. Reflect upon the unpleasantness you will be exposed to whenever this Spiterman meets you, and he will follow you everywhere."

"You really desire that I should be killed?"

"One is not necessarily killed because one fights a duel."

"But I don't even know how to hold a sword!"

"I will give you some lessons this evening," said the major; "I am one of the best blades in Paris. In two hours I warrant I'll turn you into a Saint George!"

"Then this evening I will come to your room — and you shall give me some lessons."

"And we'll empty a flask of rum, be it understood."

"And tomorrow," said De Cracoville, "at seven o'clock in the morning we'll get into a coach and we'll go to the Porte Maillot, the former entrance to the Bois."

"Tomorrow morning, yes. Oh, my God! I feel as though I were dreaming!"

"Good-by for the present, my dear fellow."

"Well, we'll see you this evening at my place," said the major. "I have some excellent foils."

"I shall be delighted to come."

Belatout went back to his bedroom, he was as one who has drunk too much champagne; but he had but one thought, one desire — and that was not to fight. He strode about his chamber, he fell over a chair and as he picked himself up he exclaimed,—

"Why, no, I'm not brave. So much the worse for me; but after all it isn't my fault! I did not make myself. Had I done so, confound it! I should be a Cæsar, an Achilles. What can I do to avoid this duel? If my son were but with me — he might replace me, a son may take his father's part in a quarrel — but I don't know where he is. Besides, I forbade him to fight, and I think he is no more of a Cæsar than I am. Why, there's Grandbec, who is going to be my son-in-law, that's quite an idea, that is; a son-in-law is almost a son! I must send for him. He told me he would be at my orders when I should have need of him; this is the very time to put his good-will to the proof."

Belatout called Jacquet and said to him,—

"Take this address, it is M. Grandbec's; go there as quickly as possible and tell him that I beg him

to come to speak to me immediately on something of the utmost importance. Go!"

"And if M. Grandbec isn't there, what message shall I leave for him?"

"You must ask where he is, and go in search of him; you must bring him with you without fail."

Belatout tried to calm himself somewhat. He sat down and sought, by every species of reasoning, to prove to himself that he was right not to fight, but in spite of himself other reflections assailed him; he thought of all he had done since he had been in Paris, where he had come to occupy himself solely with his son; instead of doing so he had allowed himself to be drawn into pleasures which had made him forget his duties. Leaving his daughter to the companionship of her servant, he had frequented restaurants and cafés, he had got tipsy, he had gambled, and to cap it all he had allowed himself to be cajoled by a light woman; she had made him commit a thousand follies, and she was the cause of his having to fight a duel — he who had such a horror of duellists.

All this presented itself incessantly to his mind, and now he bitterly repented all he had done. What a pity it is that repentance comes only after a fault.

An hour had not elapsed since Jacquet had left on his errand, when M. Grandbec himself appeared at Belatout's. The latter uttered an exclamation of joy when he saw the young man and held out

his hand to him, while Jacquet put his head in at the door and said,—

"M. Grandbec was at home and I brought him."

"That's right, go along and shut the door."

"You have something important to communicate?" said Grandbec, seating himself opposite Belatout.

"Yes, my dear fellow; yes, my dear son, I may as well call you my son, since you are to be my son-in-law."

The big, dry, yellow young man answered these demonstrations of friendship only by a very grave bow as he inquired,—

"What is the matter in hand, monsieur?"

"Well, by Jove, you will be surprised, Grandbec, you who know what very strict ideas I have in regard to duels, when I tell you what is the matter in question."

"Go on, monsieur."

"Well, my dear fellow, I was at a party—a ball at a very pretty woman's. I was talking innocently with her, oh, very innocently, I swear to you, when a jealous gentleman, who had some rights over the lady, chose to get very angry and insulted me. I answered him—I think I even gave him a pretty good punch with my fist, but that was not enough for him, and he absolutely insisted on fighting a duel with me—with swords. In fact the seconds have arranged it all, and tomorrow morning at eight o'clock he asserts he

will compel me to fight a duel in the Bois-de-Boulogne."

M. Grandbec's face lengthened still further. He answered in a very dry tone,—

"And what do you want me to do in all this, monsieur?"

"What do I want you to do? Why, it seems to me quite natural that you should take my place in this duel. If my son were with me, I should have charged him with this duty, but I don't know where to find Eugène; and in default of his being here, as you are my future son-in-law, it is for you to take my place."

"I thank you infinitely, monsieur, for the honor you would do me — but I decline it."

"You decline it! What am I to understand by that, if you please?"

"Understand that I refuse, that I have not the slightest desire to take your duel on my shoulders."

"What do you mean by that! you refuse to come to my help when I claim your support? But do you realize what would be my action in such an event, M. Grandbec?"

"You would refuse me your daughter's hand. You will not have the trouble of so doing, for I had already made up my mind to give you back your promise. You must be aware, monsieur, that I should not choose to enter the family of a man who gets tipsy, gambles, who, at an age when a man should be sober and steady, dresses himself

like a fast young fellow, learns to dance, and makes love to cocottes."

"Monsieur!"

"Your daughter also accords me a very poor welcome, your little servant puts out her tongue and makes faces at me—I might have excused all that! But a father-in-law who conducts himself like a madcap will not suit me. Good-by, monsieur, gamble, drink, run after damsels and fight duels—I wash my hands of you. I have the honor of wishing you a very good day!"

So saying, M. Grandbec took his hat and went out as grave as he had come in, leaving Belatout thunderstuck by what he had heard and unable to find a word to answer the gentleman's speech.

After some moments, Belatout looked around him and muttered,—

"He's gone! and he has refused me the favor I asked of him; he has done more, he refuses to marry my daughter. Fortunately that won't trouble Diana, who could not bear him. But now the question is, what am I to do? And my duel—that horrible duel! how am I to bear up under that? My son is decidedly necessary to me. Oh, if Madame Plantureau has only seen Eugène again. Yes, that might be possible, that's a good idea, I'll run over to Plantureau's."

Belatout came hastily out of his bedroom and met Friquette.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, master?"

"That doesn't concern you."

"You look like everything."

"That is not your business — run away now and let me pass — and mind, not a word to my daughter."

"About what, master?"

"That is my secret."

"If it is his secret, how does he imagine I can speak of it," said Friquette to herself, "but certainly something has happened to him and I must find out what it is."

Belatout took a carriage and soon reached his friend Plantureau's. The inventor was in the room where he had had the grapnels put. He was casting piteous looks at all this iron work which surrounded him and exclaiming from time to time,—

"To think that all this is of no use, they are too heavy, nobody can throw them, and if they were lighter they would not afford sufficient resistance. That is a problem to solve."

"Good-day, Plantureau!"

"Why, it's Belatout!"

"Yes, my dear fellow, I am very pleased to find you at home. Can you give me any news of my son?"

"News? Why, good God! can't you see for yourself? They are of no use at all, and I shall have to sell them by the pound."

"I need Eugène, desperately—it is for a matter I'll tell you about later on."

"I've seen the managers of the railroad; will you credit me if I tell you that some of them laughed in my face?"

"If you haven't seen him, perhaps your wife may have met him. And of course he would chat with her. He's very fond of talking with your wife."

"I treated them with contempt, I said to them, 'Gentlemen, you do not encourage progress.'"

"Look here, deuce take it, you're not listening to me, Plantureau; I ask you if you have seen my son?"

"Where the devil do you think I should have seen him? Do you suppose I have time to think of him?"

"You're very crusty! but your wife — where is your wife?"

"I know nothing about it — she goes out all day. I don't know what she is inventing, but she is never here."

"And you can't tell me where she is?"

"Four thousand francs have I spent on these grapnels! Still, they may serve for something yet!"

Belatout saw that he could not get Plantureau to listen to him, and that, as his friend's wife was away, he must renounce the hope of learning anything about his son; he decided to go back to the hotel. He got into the carriage again; on the way he changed his idea and told the coachman to drive him along the boulevards and to go slowly; the

man followed his directions and Belatout, putting his head out of the door, looked carefully at all the male passers-by in the hope of perceiving his son among them. He did this for four hours, having himself driven through the most frequented streets; but he did not see him and returned to the hotel after his accustomed dinner hour. He found his daughter uneasy and Friquette getting ready to go in search of him. He sat down to the table, his appetite was no better than it had been at breakfast, but he drank; he returned to the bottle with a kind of avidity.

"Let's see if that won't give me courage," he said to himself.

The time had come for him to go to the major's. Belatout rose unsteadily; he kissed his daughter, then he kissed her again. Diana, surprised by this accession of tenderness, to which she was unaccustomed, looked at her father with concern. Friquette did not take her eyes off him. He was going out, but he came back to kiss his daughter for the third time, then he said to her,—

"Au revoir! that is to say — perhaps it may be farewell."

"What do you mean, father?"

"Me, nothing! I made a mistake, I was thinking of something else. Au revoir — for they will have enough to do — au revoir — "

Belatout went to the major's apartments, where he found him with De Cracoville; these gentle-

men were playing écarté and drinking rum, of which they hastened to offer a glass to their visitor; they were in a jolly humor, which seemed ridiculously out of place to the provincial, who said,—

"You seem very cheerful this evening, my dear fellows!"

"And why should we not be cheerful, my dear neighbor? This rum is really very good."

"But don't you remember that I've a duel on hand tomorrow?"

"Well, would you wish us to be melancholy for such a trifle as that? A duel is a very simple thing, there is nothing to be sad about."

"Oh, M. de Cracoville, if it was you who were to fight, you wouldn't be so cheerful about it."

"Me! Why, M. de Montabord, I've had more than fifteen duels in the course of my life, and I always went on the ground whistling a tune."

"As for me," said the major, "I couldn't tell you the number of duels I have fought, it is fabulous. The day on which I had to fight a duel was a white day for me."

"Oh, but, major, arms is your occupation. In fact, gentlemen, if you like duelling so much will not one of you take my place? it would very greatly oblige me."

"Impossible, my dear fellow, impossible! Everything must be done under established rules, we are your seconds, we shall be there ready to hold our own against them."

"You are devilishly ferocious, you want everybody to fight now."

"Have something to drink, M. de Montabord, and come and take a lesson in fencing. I'll teach you how to use your sword."

Belatout drank, and, trembling like a leaf, took the foil which the major offered him; then, first assuring himself that the button was firmly secured, the latter placed him and showed him how to put himself on guard; and De Cracoville, seeing that Belatout could hardly hold his weapon, poured out for him a second glass of rum.

"Here, drink this," said he, "and you'll be able to hold your sword more firmly."

Belatout drank and presently felt better. The major made him parry quart, parry tierce, and encouraged him exclaiming,—

"That's it! another little drop of rum!"

"Really, it does make my hand surer," said Belatout, swallowing the third glass.

"Now strike at me, attack! attack again, don't let your opponent breathe, tire him, that is the grand play. That's it! that's it!"

"A little more rum," said Belatout, "it is surprising how that sets me up. Would you believe it, my dear fellows, my fear has entirely left me?"

"Why, we felt sure you would soon find your courage."

"Well, I wouldn't have believed it. Come, major, I'm ready for you, I'm on the defense."

"Very good — superb. Take some more rum and you'll button me."

"Willingly; this rum warms me up. At you, major, defend yourself!"

"Very good indeed — but now we'll rest a little.

"Do you want to rest, major? I'm quite ready to go on."

"We'll resume the lesson later on. Let us rest and have a game of écarté."

"So be it, anything you like — though I should prefer to fight."

They sat down and began a game of cards; but De Cracoville and the major were careful to keep up their pupil's courage by making him drink punch after the rum; and Belatout, who was now very reckless, soon lost the hundred francs he had about him; after which he got up and wanted to resume the fencing lesson. But he could not keep his equilibrium, and the two players, seeing that he was unable to hold his cards, advised him to go to bed, assuring him that they would come to call for him the next morning at seven o'clock.

Belatout returned home, staggering a little and talking to himself. Just as he went into his own room he met Friquette who, candlestick in hand, was watching for her master's return. By his jovial face and his vacillating walk she saw that he was tipsy again. As for Belatout, when he saw the little maid he put himself on guard, made a thrust at her with his hand, shouting to her,—

"Have at you, Friquette! parry that—and this! Why don't you parry?"

"Good heavens, monsieur, what is the matter with you this evening? What, do you want to fight?"

"Friquette, I've been taking a lesson at sword-play at the major's—and a famous lesson, too."

"Why did you do that, monsieur?"

"That I might be expert enough to kill my opponent tomorrow morning in the Bois-de-Boulogne, at eight o'clock."

"What do you say, monsieur? You are going to fight tomorrow in the Bois-de-Boulogne, and with whom?"

"With that German—that Spiterman, the furious rival—but he's done for, I shall surely kill him. My seconds have assured me I shall!"

"Oh, my God, a duel? You, monsieur?"

"Yes, Friquette. At first I was very much alarmed at the idea, but now I've quite got over that—because you see; one, two, bang—and there you are! It's no more difficult than that."

"Take care, monsieur, you are going to fall."

"That's nothing—on guard!"

"Oh, monsieur, it is impossible to believe you are going to fight, you who have such a horror of duels."

"It is true; but look you, I feel very tired. I think I'll go to bed. But now let me warn you, Friquette, not a word to my daughter."

"But monsieur —"

"Not a word! I'm going to bed — one, two."

Belatout went into his room, and Friquette, all in a maze at what she had learned, quickly went off, muttering to herself,—

"It was I who urged him to do as he has done, in mamzelle's interest — to help on her love affair with M. Marcelin. But indeed, I don't want master to fight a duel, and he shan't fight one."

CHAPTER XV

One Should Swear to Nothing

As may be imagined, after all the excitement of the preceding twenty-four hours, repose was highly necessary to Belatout, yet he slept very ill; the intoxication of alcohol is far worse in its effects than that caused by wine. At five o'clock in the morning he left his bed; he was a very different man from what he had been on the evening before; with the fumes of the rum had evaporated all his bellicose ideas. His fictitious valor had disappeared; and he had returned to his former cowardice. When he remembered the fact that he was to fight a duel with a practical swordsman on this very morning, he sat down on his bed again and said to himself,—

"What if I go to bed again, pretend I am ill, and do not get up for a fortnight? But how would that avail me? I should have to get up later on and that confounded baron said that he would follow me everywhere; what a wasp's nest I have got into."

Belatout put on his trousers, then he paused, took them off, got back into bed, and a few minutes later got up and put them on again. He did

the same with each of his garments, then he heard a rap at his door; he jumped with fright as he called out,—

"Who's there? I'm not here."

Some one half opened the door and Jacquet appeared.

"What do you want, stupid; who told you to come and wake me so early?"

"Why, you are up, master; I didn't wake you."

"Well, why did you come? I didn't ring for you."

"Master, the witnesses you were expecting are here and they told me to come and tell you. It seems you have witnesses when you go a-walking now."

"What! are they here already? Is it seven o'clock?"

"Yes, it's just striking; don't you hear it?"

"Good God! seven o'clock already. Is any one up in the hotel?"

"Yes, Friquette has been out for a long time now."

"Friquette has gone out? where has she gone?"

"That is what I don't know. Where can she have gone to? She doesn't know anybody in Paris. Look you, master, that's a very taking little girl, if I were you, I should look after her."

Belatout paid no attention to Jacquet, he finished dressing; he wondered if he had better go and kiss his daughter before starting; however,

while he was hesitating, De Cracoville and the major appeared, saying,—

"Come, you idle fellow — there's no time to lose — the carriage is below — one should never be behindhand — it looks bad. Come, come along!"

Each of them took one of his arms and led him, carried him almost, and made him get into the carriage, without leaving him time to realize what he was doing. Belatout looked at his seconds.

"Where are we going in this fashion?" he said.

"You know well — to the meeting-place in the Bois-de-Boulogne gate."

"Gentlemen, I haven't the slightest intention of fighting a duel."

"You are joking, we left you so firmly decided last night."

"Last night you induced me to drink a good deal of rum — I was not in my normal condition. See here, gentlemen! Confound it! isn't there some way of settling things without getting one's self killed?"

"Listen to me, my dear M. de Montabord," said De Cracoville, "you can well imagine that we do not wish you to fight this duel. There are a good many duels which, on the ground, change into a breakfast paid for by one of the adversaries."

"Oh, my dear fellow! I am willing to pay for it — I ask nothing better than to pay for the best breakfast that can be had — a course breakfast."

"Which might wind up with a little game at baccarat," suggested the major.

"With all the games you wish. I beg of you, change this affair into a breakfast."

"We will try; it must be confessed that you were in the wrong."

"I will acknowledge it."

"Apologize to the baron, and if he accepts your excuses we'll hie to the restaurant."

"That's it, we'll all go to the restaurant and I won't tarry. Gentlemen, this hope restores all my courage."

"Then you want to fight?'

"No, confound it! don't deceive yourselves there."

"And my lessons of yesterday?"

"Your lessons, major, I had totally forgotten that you had instructed me. I don't even know how to hold a sword."

"Here we are."

"Already! the cab must have come at a good pace."

They alighted from the cab. Belatout perceived then that the major had brought some swords for the combat, which he had hidden in the back of the cab; he exclaimed,—

"Why did you bring these weapons, major?"

"It is customary when one is going to fight a duel —"

"But since it is to be a breakfast,"

"If the baron accepts your apologies; but if he won't, it is necessary to be prepared."

"But if there are no weapons, no one can fight."

"Be easy, if we did not have them, the baron's seconds would. Come, let's go on, I know in which pathway they are awaiting us."

"De Cracoville, give me your arm, I can hardly stand."

They set off but they could not go quickly, for they had almost to drag Belatout to get him along. At a turn in the pathway they at length perceived M. Spiterman, accompanied by two young men.

"Do you see, they've got there before us," said the major.

"No, I see nothing," murmured Belatout, "my eyes are dim."

"But they see us and are signing to us to follow them; we'll do so, they know the best places."

"The best places to breakfast?"

"To fight in."

"But since I only wish to breakfast —"

"Deuce take it, M. de Montabord, let us arrange things according to the rules in such cases."

The baron and his witnesses were ensconced in a thicket where people never passed. De Cracoville and the major managed, not without trouble, to get Belatout there. The principals and seconds then met; two loud shouts were suddenly heard. Spiterman had for his seconds little Mirza and young Eugène Belatout.

"Father!"

"My son."

These were the exclamations that were simultaneously uttered.

"What, father, are you M. Spiterman's adversary? Why, they told me his opponent was called Montabord."

"Yes, my dear fellow; that, in fact, is the name I adopted on coming to Paris to look for you."

"And you are going to fight a duel? It isn't possible!"

"What! Is that gentleman your father? Well, my dear Eugène, I can't compliment you upon him. So that is the M. Belatout who was displeased because you amused yourself in Paris, because you courted the ladies, loved the pleasures of the table, play, balls, and all the enjoyments natural to your age? Well, do you know what he has been doing in Paris? I'll tell you — he frequents — I don't know what sort of — "

As he said these words he glanced at De Cracoville and the major, who contented themselves with frowning. Then he continued,—

"He gambled, lost all his money very foolishly, got so tipsy that he could not stand, and made love to my mistress. That is what your father has done in Paris."

"Monsieur," said Belatout, "it seems to me that you might have refrained from telling all that to my son — "

"And why shouldn't I tell him? I am delighted, on the contrary, that he should know you as you are. And now we've had enough of words, we'll get to work with our swords."

The baron took off his coat and handed it to little Mirza, who at the same time presented him with a sword. Belatout turned as pale as death. Eugène ran to Spiterman, crying,—

"I hope you are not going to fight my father."

"Of course I am. By Jove, your father insulted me, struck me with his fist."

"I did not do it on purpose," faltered Belatout.

"You are making game of me — and when I begged you to depart from Ethelwina's you said to me, 'You be blowed, monsieur,' I cannot forgive that expression."

"What, father! did you say 'You be blowed,' to the baron?"

"As if I know what I said. In fact, since monsieur must absolutely fight, take my place, Eugène, I will yield it to you."

"You want me to fight for you? Oh, no, my dear father; I remember too well all you've said to me concerning duels. You threatened me with your curse if I ever had one. I don't want to expose myself to that by fighting. Besides, I am well persuaded that the baron would not accept me as his adversary."

"Most assuredly not. Look you, monsieur, are we never going to make an end of it?"

So saying, Spiterman brandished his sword and almost thrust his face into Belatout's.

"Yes, monsieur, we are going to make an end of it," said a young man who had kept himself hidden behind some trees, from whence he could see everything that passed, and who, gently pushing Belatout aside, placed himself in front of the baron, at whom he looked in a very provoking manner.

"Marcelin!" cried Eugène and his father at the same time.

"And who is this we have here?" said Spiterman, "and where does he come from? By what right, monsieur, do you place yourself between me and my opponent?"

"Because it is I who am your adversary."

"You? I don't know you!"

"I know you well enough to tell you that you are a coward to want to fight with one who does not know how to hold a sword."

"A coward! that word will cost you dear, monsieur! and when I have finished with Belatout, it will be your turn."

"Not at all; you are going to measure your sword with mine now — this instant! if not, I will slap you in the face with the best grace in the world. Come, Baron Spiterman, you make a good deal of fuss about fighting, now you have an opponent who knows how to defend himself. If you are afraid, apologize to M. Belatout and the matter will be settled."

"Afraid! I! make apologies! Devil take you! Guard yourself, monsieur, and when I have finished with you, the others will have to take their medicine too."

"That remains to be seen, monsieur."

Marcelin went to take one of the swords which the major held. The latter and De Cracoville wanted to interpose and prevent the combat, which did not seem regular to them. But the baron pushed them away angrily, saying,—

"Get back, d——n you, and leave us alone, or you also will have business with me."

When he saw Marcelin take off his coat and place himself opposite Spiterman, Belatout felt ready to be ill; he was obliged to go and lean against a tree to support himself. But from there he did not lose sight of the combatants.

The baron was an expert swordsman, but at that moment he was blinded by fury and charged on his adversary in double quick time. Marcelin, on the contrary, preserved all his presence of mind, and at the moment when Spiterman made a lunge at him he drew on his adversary and buried his sword in the baron's right side.

The baron fell. Belatout uttered an exclamation.

"My God! is he dead?"

"No, but he'll be lucky if he gets over it," said the major, who was examining the wound.

"We must at least give him succor."

"His carriage is not far off," said Mirza. "Gentlemen, help me, we'll carry him to it!"

"Please, gentlemen, lavish all your care upon him," said Belatout, addressing De Cracoville and the major. "As for me, I owe this man no grudge. But after all, had Marcelin not taken my place, I should have been in his plight myself and I certainly prefer that matters should be as they are. Marcelin, Eugène, come with me, don't stay here any longer, my heart is too much oppressed; unless, Eugène, you prefer to stay with your baron?"

"Oh, no, father. He wanted to fight with you and I am no longer his friend."

Belatout left the wood, supported by his son and Marcelin, to whom he said,—

"My dear fellow, I owe you my life and I have not yet thanked you — why, I will thank you better later on. By what miracle did you find yourself there just at the moment when my position was no longer tenable?"

"Why, it was very simple, monsieur. This morning, before six o'clock, Friquette was at my place and told me you were to fight a duel at eight o'clock in the Bois-de-Boulogne. Then I watched your departure from afar and followed you."

"What! it was Friquette? She knew, then, that you were in Paris?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur, I have met her several times, as also your daughter."

"I understand; decidedly, all is for the best."

They got into a carriage, and presently arrived at the hotel, where Diana was uneasily awaiting her father's return; for without telling her positively the cause of her agitation, Friquette had not hidden from her that a great event was going to take place. So the young girl uttered a cry of joy when she saw her father come in and her happiness was redoubled when she saw her brother and her lover. M. Belatout took Marcelin by the hand and led him towards his daughter, saying,—

"Here, Diana, let me present your husband to you."

"My husband! can it be possible that you consent to our marriage?"

"Oh, monsieur, how happy I am."

"Yes, my children, I consent, but on one condition; that we leave this city and return to Barle-Duc at once, this morning even. I have had enough of Paris. I have committed nothing but folly since I have been here and I don't wish to continue it. Eugène, will you not come back with us? Be assured, I shan't ask you to marry Mademoiselle de Boissalé. You shall not marry until it pleases you to do so — and I'll never forbid you to amuse yourself again."

"In that case, father, I'll go with you and I'll never leave you."

"Very well, I see that everybody is pleased, even Friquette, who's jumping over there in a corner."